PlayStation.

FEBRUARY 08

The Official Magazine

CRISIS CORE
FINAL FANTASY VII
EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON WITH THE U.S. RELEASE

20+
PREVIEWS
TOMB RAIDER 8
STAR WARS:
THE FORCE
UNLEASHED
RAINBOW
SIX: VEGAS 2
MAFIA 2

Complete FFVII
Character Guide

WIN!
FFVII
GOODIE
BAGS

THE FUTURE OF
PLAYSTATION
TOP DEVELOPERS TELL
YOU WHAT TO EXPECT

GAME OF THE
YEAR AWARDS
WE ANNOUNCE THE
OFFICIAL WINNERS

future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

Contents

February 2008 — **PlayStation** The Official Magazine

See how your favorite games of 2007 compare with ours in our Games of the Year '07 round-up.

GAMES OF THE YEAR '07

PS3　PSP　PS2

Above: Itching to get your hands on *Crisis Core*? Check out our exclusive preview of the U.S. version. Right: Developers spill their creative thoughts.

The white Dual Shock 3 (shown) is beyond sexy... see page 10 for full details.

The Creator Roundtable

How does the PlayStation look to some of the guys tasked with imagining the games you'll play in the future? Here are a few things they've learned so far and what you can expect.

The Creators

NAUGHTY DOG

INSOMNIAC
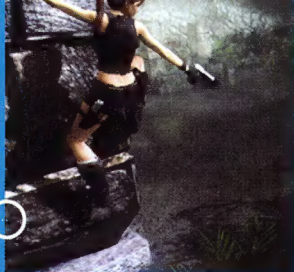
Gaming's leading lady is back...and in high definition. Details and dazzling screens inside.

Find out how well the latest rendition of this racing series holds up to our critics.

Show up your friends in *PAIN* with our developer multiplayer tips.

Previews

Reviews

Network

We love PSN's free *Uncharted* theme (shown above).

Editor's Note

"Do not speak to me of rules. This is war! This is not a game of cricket!"

Great games sell consoles. It's really that simple. Bells and whistles, be they Blu-ray lasers, HDMI inputs, internet connectivity, and more are all superfluous if the games that take advantage of those hardware pieces fail to deliver what gamers want. If ever you wanted evidence of the strength of the PlayStation 3 line-up, I believe this issue is it. Among the reviews this month *Burnout Paradise* (a personal favorite) earns our Editors' Choice recommendation, as does *Unreal Tournament III*. Joining games like *Uncharted*, *Rock Band*, *Ratchet*, *Call of Duty 4*, and more on store shelves, PlayStation 3 gamers are starting to get the options they crave. And while that's the here and now, the future is also remarkably rosy, as evidenced by our previews of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, *Tomb Raider 8*, *Battlefield: Bad Company*, and *Rainbow Six Vegas 2*, among others.

In keeping with the view to the future, we used our official access to sit down with the lead creators of *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and *Ratchet & Clank Future* to find out what they've learned so far about game development on PS3, and vitally, what they're striving to achieve in the games they're working on now for two years or more down the road. We expect to make this kind of story a regular feature going forward, so head to page 62 and then let me know what you think.

PSP had a banner year in 2007. The quality of so many games for the system was remarkably high (occupying my PSP the most was *Renegade Squadron* and *Syphon Filter*),

> **If ever you wanted evidence of the strength of the PlayStation 3 line-up, I believe this issue is it.**

and with growing functionality it promises to get stronger still in 2008. As high profile games on PlayStation 2 become harder and harder to find, the PSP is proving to be fertile ground for game developers. For *Final Fantasy* fans, the U.S. release of *Crisis Core* is a major deal, bringing the latest chapter in the classic series to the handheld. Assistant Editor Teresa Dun, in her first cover story, was giddy as a *Final Fantasy* fan can be to get her hands on the U.S. release of the game. You can read her impressions starting on page 52. If you happen to be a *Final Fantasy* noob, we've got you covered with a detailed who's who and what's what to get you up to speed.

So we're making strides with the new *P:TOM* and will continue to refine it over the coming months. Be sure to let me know what you think by emailing me at editor@psmonline.com.

Rob

"Quote" contest

Enter to win a Blu-ray movie! That headline at the top of this column is a quote from a movie. **Identify the movie, send your answer (along with your name and shipping address) to editor@psmonline.com** with "Ed Note February" in the subject line. I'll pick one lucky winner at random to receive a Blu-ray movie. I'll be sending one out to Michael Baldelli of Wallingford, CT who identified the quote last issue from *Children of Men*.

I know this guy
on my block.
Every time I see him
he asks me to get high.
And every time I
tell him that
I'm not into that.
He says all the
kids are doing it.
If that's true,
then why can't he find
someone else to
do it with?

abovetheinfluence.com

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>> DEV-OGRAPHY 1.1

PS3 EXCLUSIVES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

Sony Studios, far and wide

How come you haven't seen great games such as *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, *Rachet & Clank Future*, *Heavenly Sword*, or *Motorstorm* on any system other than PlayStation 3? Because they were either made by SCEA/SCEE or one of its "second-party" partners — studios they don't own, but are developing exclusively for PS3. These internal and external development teams — collectively known as Sony Worldwide Studios — span the globe, and all have impressive track records. They're also all working on fresh PS3 exclusives we'll see in 2008 and beyond, zipping the lips of naysayers who'd try and convince you there's nothing on PS3 you can't get elsewhere.

SLANT SIX GAMES
Vancouver, British Columbia
Best known for: *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror, SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs Tactical Strike*
Working on: *SOCOM: Confrontation* (PSN)

ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
Redmond, WA
Best known for: *SOCOM* series
Working on: *SOCOM* PS3

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT SEATTLE
Seattle, WA
Best Known for: (New studio)
Working on: *The Agency*

SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS
Bellvue, WA
Best known for: *Sly Cooper* series
Working on: *InFamous*

SCE BEND
Bend, OR
Best known for: *Syphon Filter* Series
Working on: Researching PS3 for upcoming title(s)

INCOGNITO, INC.
Salt Lake City, UT
Best known for: *Twisted Metal: Black, Warhawk*
Working on: *Twisted Metal* PS3 (rumored)

SCE FOSTER CITY STUDIO/ 989 STUDIOS
Foster City, CA
Best known for: *Jet Li: Rise to Honor*
Working on: Researching PS3 for upcoming title(s)

READY AT DAWN
Santa Ana, CA
Best known for: *Daxter* (PSP)
Working on: *God of War: Chains of Olympus* (PSP), researching PS3 for upcoming title(s)

SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO
Santa Monica, CA
Best known for: *God of War*
Working on: *God of War III* for PS3

NAUGHTY DOG, INC.
Santa Monica, CA
Best known for: *Crash Bandicoot, Jak & Daxter, Uncharted*
Working on: *Uncharted* sequel, new *Jak* title (rumored)

SCE SAN DIEGO
San Diego, CA
Best known for: *NBA 08, MLB '07: The Show*
Working on: *MLB '08: The Show*

INSOMNIAC GAMES
Santa Monica, CA
Best known for: *Spyro, Ratchet & Clank, Resistance: Fall of Man*
Working on: *Resistance 2* (rumored), new *Ratchet* title (rumored)

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
San Diego, CA
Best known for: *EverQuest*
Working on: *DC Universe Online* (PS3 MMO)

Southern California

● Sony First-Party Developers
● Sony Second-Party Developers

SCE CAMBRIDGE STUDIO
Cambridge, England
Best known for: *Primal, Ghosthunter*
Working on: Researching PS3 for upcoming title(s)

NINJA THEORY
Cambridge, England
Best known for: *Heavenly Sword*
Working on: *Heavenly Sword 2* (rumored)

SCE LIVERPOOL STUDIO
Liverpool, England
Best known for: *Wipeout*
Working on: *Wipeout HD* (PSN),
Wipeout PS3, Colony Wars PS3 (rumored)

GUERILLA GAMES
Amsterdam, Netherlands
Best known for: *Killzone* series

BIGBIG STUDIOS
Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, UK
Best known for: *Pursuit Force*
Working on: Researching PS3 for upcoming title(s)

U.K.

EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Runcorn, Cheshire, UK
Best known for: *Motorstorm, WRC* series
Working on: *Motorstorm 2*

SCE LONDON STUDIO/ TEAM SOHO
London, England
Best known for: *The Getaway, SingStar*
Working on: *Eight Days, The Getaway III, SingStar PS3*

CLAP HANZ
Tokyo, Japan
Best known for: *Hot Shots Golf* series
Working on: *Hot Shots Golf 5* for PS3

TEAM ICO
Tokyo, Japan
Best known for: *ICO, Shadow of the Colossus*
Working on: Untitled PS3 game

SCE JAPAN STUDIO
Tokyo, Japan
Best known for: *The Eye of Judgment*, many PS1 and PS2 classics
Working on: *echochrome*, numerous unannounced PS3 projects

Japan

POLYPHONY DIGITAL
Tokyo, Japan
Best known for: *Gran Turismo* series
Working on: *Gran Turismo 5*

GAME REPUBLIC
Osaka, Japan
Best known for: *Genji* series, *Folklore*
Working on: *Toy Home, Dark Mist*

PlayStation Digest
Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities

Get Ready to Rumble

You'll be able to pick up your very own DualShock 3 controller sometime in spring 2008, but in the meantime, here is just a foretaste of the titles that'll support rumble (you'll have to download a patch through PlayStation Network for some):

Assassin's Creed

Burnout Paradise
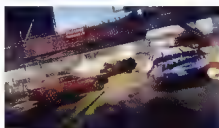
Devil May Cry 4

Haze

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

Sweet, Sweet Vibrations

Our fingers brush the milky white skin, so soft and smooth. We entwine the supple weight in our hands, and give a gentle, loving squeeze. We caress a knob with a thumb, push all the right buttons, and in response, we feel a small vibration—a purr, if you will—and our movements become more frantic as we try to nudge that purr into a seismic howl.

Yes, we've missed our rumble something desperate, and now that we finally have it back, we can't keep our hands off our DualShock 3.

We snuck our DualShock 3 in early through connections in Japan, but expect a full-blown hardware review when it is released in North America.

DUALSHOCK 3

SIXAXIS

1 2 3 4

Also
Heavenly Sword
Metal Gear Solid 4:
 Guns of the Patriots
MotorStorm
Ratchet & Clank Future:
 Tools of Destruction
Resistance: Fall of Man
Unreal Tournament 3
Warhawk

Photos by Samantha Berg

PlayStation Digest

GTA IV Boxart a Slight Upgrade from Previous Rendition

① The obligatory helicopter now has a man shooting out of it, giving the cover a more dynamic feel. In many ways, each of the boxes tells their own little story.

② The token hot chick licking a red lollipop gets extra points because we like, uh, candy.

③ Cell phones are useful for communication. Cell phones are useful for killing time. Cell phones are useful for looking suave while holding a gun in *GTA IV* cover art.

④ While *GTA III*'s cover art had plenty of faces and no guns, *GTA IV*'s cover has plenty of both, along with detailed backdrops of Liberty City scenery.

⑤ Facial expressions were certainly present in *GTA III*'s art, but not with this amount of shading and texture.

grand theft auto IV
①
②
③
④
⑤

The New

PlayStation.2
grand theft auto III
M
R

The Old

The PlayStation Store for your PSP...On your PC?!

Right around Thanksgiving, SCEA slipped in a quiet little surprise: a PlayStation Store where you can download and purchase all sorts of goodies (themes, wallpapers, videos) for your PSP. The bizarre catch is that this PSP-centric store is only perusable...on your PC. Yes, very odd, but Eric Lempel, the PlayStation director in charge of the store, says that that's due to security risks (he may have caught wind of certain less-than-ethical homebrew activities) and the difficulty of designing a PSP-based store navigation interface.

To access the PC PSP store's content you'll need to download a free PlayStation Network downloader application (currently only for PC but it should be Mac compatible soon), create an account (it's the same as your PS3 account, or you can easily register a new one), and hook your PSP to your PC via USB cable. Once you've got it all set up, you can check out game demos or buy and download full PSP games like *WipEout* and *Gangs of London*. (By the time this issue ships, *SOCOM Fire Team Bravo* and *Twisted Metal: Head-On* should be up there, too.) You'll also be able to purchase PlayStation store original content, like *Syphon Filter: Combat Ops*.

The store should pick up steam as more content is released. Check it out at store.playstation.com.

PLAYSTATION.Store
Get It Now

PSP Internet Radio

Zero Cult - H

Alongside the plethora of quality games for the handheld, by the time you read this SCEA will have announced that you can now listen to the radio using your PSP. [illegible] requires a little effort, but it should be worth it:

How to use Internet Radio on PSP:

- Download and install firmware update 3.80.
- Ensure you are in a Wi-Fi environment before attempting use.
- With Memory Stick Duo containing firmware update 3.80 inserted into PSP, select the Internet Radio icon under Network, and then 'About Internet Radio'.
- Click 'Add Player'.
- [illegible] icon will appear under the 'About Internet Radio' icon.
- Select the Internet Radio player icon.
- Choose a genre and select a station.

We Stand Corrected

In regards to our Capcom announcements on page 11 of our premiere issue, we have a clarification from Capcom. They state officially, "Capcom has not yet revealed any platforms for *Street Fighter 4*."

Also, in our review of *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops Plus* on page 78 of that issue we state that you need the original UMD to play the expansion. In fact, *Portable Ops Plus* is standalone. It does not require the original *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* to play

HARVEY SMITH, best known for his design contributions to the critically acclaimed *Deus Ex* (developed by Ion Storm), has left Midway Austin, where he had been working as lead designer on *BlackSite: Area 51*. A few days prior to his departure, while speaking at the Montreal International Game Summit 2007, Smith delivered a scathing postmortem of his own game.

"This project was so f---ed up," Smith admitted candidly. "Everyone was forced to share tech. it took eight months to get one thing working." With no time to adequately play-test the game, "it went straight from alpha to final." Why was he sharing this information? "I believe in personal accountability," he said. "We got hammered so hard, and we deserved it."

According to Denise Fulton, Midway Austin's studio head, Smith's departure was by "mutual agreement."

In a move that takes the industry by surprise, VIVENDI has bought $1.7 billion in ACTIVISION stock. The two companies are now merged into a single entity called Activision Blizzard. With access to Universal Music Group and NBC Universal, the new company will present some serious competition to publishing powerhouse Electronic Arts. Does this mean we'll finally be seeing *World of Warcraft* on our PS3s? Blizzard CEO Mike Morhaime states, "We intend to grow our subscriber base and are also looking at additional markets…" but also that they "don't have any plans [for *World of Warcraft*] on the console side."

To investigate complaints that JACK THOMPSON's behavior in videogame-related court cases is, well, less than professional, the Florida Bar is putting Thompson on trial. Presiding over the case is Judge Dava Tunis. At first, Thompson tried to block the trial by suing the Florida Bar and Judge Dava Tunis, but his case was dismissed. Then, he offered to accept a 90-day suspension of his law license if they would drop but case, but that, too, was rejected. Thompson's trial officially begins on November 26. Here's hoping that these events lead to his disbarment.

Game Industry Happenings
The Who's and What's in the World of Games

Harvey Smith leaves Midway Austin… Hillary Clinton, Joe Lieberman, Evan Bayh, and Sam Brownback ask ESRB to review their content rating system… Activision and Vivendi merge to become Activision Blizzard … Keita Takahashi of Katamari Damacy fame to design a playground in Nottingham… Rich Taylor joins the ESA Executive Team… Ken Kutaragi to receive 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences… Jack Thompson on trial in Florida.

RICH TAYLOR, formerly a senior VP for the Motion Picture Association of America, joins the Entertainment Software Association (the trade organization responsible for protecting the interest of U.S. videogame publishers in the political arena) as the Senior VP for Communications and Research. ESA president Mike Gallagher says the industry is "very lucky to have Rich aboard." While at the MPAA, Taylor helped fight against illegal downloading.

esa entertainment software association

PSP MTV UMD
As the PSP platform for games gets healthier with each passing quality game release, the UMD market all but died. Maybe it will get a shot in the arm from a deal with MTV that will see several of the pop culture station's offerings appear on UMD around mid-January. Expect similar deals to bring media content to UMD in the coming months, and look for these titles in stores soon:
Aeon Flux
Beavis and Butthead, Vol. 2 and 3
Jackass, Vol. 2 and 3
Viva La Bam, Vol. 1
Wildboyz

Happy thoughts.

RICHARD BAKER
BEYOND CALL OF DUTY 4

What insight can we eke from the Lead Software Engineer at Infinity Ward on what to expect for the future of cutting-edge PS3 game design?

We try, we really do. When a team like Infinity Ward wows gamers across all platforms with its latest game—in this case, *Call of Duty 4*—other teams wonder how they did it. What's more, those other developers wonder what they're working on next (as do the fans). But Richard Baker's spilling no beans, although his thoughts on the potential of Cell indicate a future we all look forward to seeing. We had five minutes to get those thoughts!
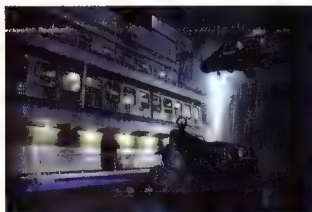

This is not Richard Baker.

Richard Baker 411

TITLE: Lead Software Engineer
EDUCATION: B.S. in Electrical Engineering at Texas A&M University
FIRST GAME YOU WORKED ON: *Pilotwings 64*

PTOM: What was the single biggest lesson you learned about PS3 during the development of *Call of Duty 4*?
Richard Baker: The biggest challenge with the PS3 is taking full advantage of the Cell processor. We had a lot of experience with multi-threaded programming with *Call of Duty 2* on the PC and Xbox 360, but programming for the PS3's SPUs provided unique challenges. You really want as much code running on SPUs as possible.

PTOM: Having shipped a very popular game on PS3, you guys seem to have handled the PS3 hardware pretty effectively. How did you do it?
RB: We started working on the PS3 version of the *Call of Duty* engine before *Call of Duty 2* shipped, and we had a portion of the team focused on PS3 throughout the development of *Call of Duty 4*. Getting the game working early on the hardware allowed us a lot of time to move code to the SPUs. Moving code to the SPU was important in getting the best performance

possible. We ported much of the rendering engine, including the animation and particle effect systems. We also had some of the networking, audio, and physics code on the SPU by the end of the development.

PTOM: How much do you consider *Call of Duty 4* tapped the available power of the PS3?
RB: It is hard to fully quantify how much potential the PS3 has. We certainly have a significant amount of untapped SPU power. Even though we moved many of our systems to the SPU for *Call of Duty 4*, we are planning on moving more of the collision and AI to the SPU. We are also investigating doing more procedural animation on the SPU for our next project. Using the SPU for procedural animation allows for another level of interactivity that wasn't really practical on the previous generation of hardware.

PTOM: If you're starting work on a new game for two or three years from now, what kind of upgrades can we expect to those upcoming games?

> "It is hard to fully quantify how much potential the PS3 has. We certainly have a significant amount of untapped SPU power." — Richard Baker

RB: We are still in the early planning stages for our next game. We don't like to announce features until we have chance to prove them in the context of the game. *[We asked, we tried...—Ed]*

PTOM: Beyond pure visuals, how do you view the potential for other gameplay advances when all the power of PS3 is harnessed? Any specifics that you're working towards?
RB: We are always trying to push the game experience to the next level, but I can't talk about specific plans for the next project. *[Thwarted again—Ed]*

PTOM: How does PlayStation Home factor in your plans for future game development on PS3?
RB: We are excited about playing around with PlayStation

Home. It is uncertain which aspects of Home will be integrated into current or future games at this point.

PTOM: How much of a benefit was it to *CoD4* design to know that you had Blu-ray storage and a hard drive to work with?
RB: We didn't depend on the hard drive for *Call of Duty 4*. It was nice to not to have to worry about space with Blu-ray.

PTOM: Will development team sizes swell even further due to the art potential for future PS3 games?
RB: Infinity Ward is always looking to hire talented people. We firmly believe in quality over quantity. So, we haven't felt compelled to grow as quickly as some of our competition.

PTOM: How does the shape and make-up of the staff at a studio like Infinity Ward evolve as you progress further into PS3 game development?
RB: Artists and designers tend to be platform-agnostic during most of the project. At the end of the project, they refine some of the content for each platform. The programmers develop features for all platforms throughout the project.

Happy thoughts.

Blu-ray Central Post-holiday release malaise

Santa Clause 3
The Escape Clause
PRICE: $23.95 RATED: G

Tim Allen reprises his role as Santa for the third time, and Martin Short plays Jack Frost. I forgive you for stopping reading right here. A holiday movie. For the family. Occasional—very occasional—chuckles. If young kids really like it, then start blooding them on better fare.

MOVIES	★ ↗
FEATURES	★ ★

Pirates of the Caribbean:
At World's End
PRICE: $34.99 RATED: PG-13

Awful. Plain awful. Pirates 1: Terrific. Pirates 2: Meh. And finally Pirates 3: A mess. Johnny Depp's Jack Sparrow is this single biggest draw to the series, and so how come he doesn't even appear for the first about 30 minutes? And then, the *Being John Malkovich* scene as he hallucinates is just plain rubbish. If you haven't watched the previous two movies recently, you could also get lost as the convoluted plot devolves with each passing minute into something bordering on incomprehensible. It wasn't until the long, dramatic final fight scene that any kind of redeeming quality could be eked from this mammoth disappointment.

MOVIES	★
FEATURES	★ ★
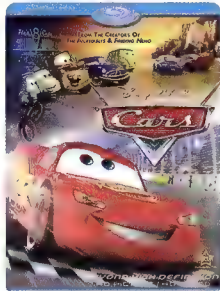
Cars
PRICE: $23.95 RATED: G

Family fun from Pixar, what's not to love? The broad stereotype character cars deliver the guffaws and mild chuckles, but as with *Ratatouille*, there's something fundamentally non-lovable about cars. Fish, yes. Toys, yes. Rats and cars, not so much. But the kids are going to love it and the extra games on the Blu-ray, along with the features, ensure the package has sufficient value.

MOVIES	★ ★ ★
FEATURES	★ ★ ★

The Legend of Zorro
PRICE: $28.95 RATED: PG

It's kinda like the A-Team, but in California in 1850. The swashing and buckling is full of bravado, quick-footed choreography, and nary a drop of blood. Despite leaps from tall buildings, rifles fired into crowds (bullets whip the hats off hapless soldiers but never touch flesh), and other derring-do, the body count is about zero. And that's fine for this throwaway adventure starring Antonio Banderas as the titular masked man, and Catherine Zeta-Jones as his super-hot wife. The summersaults and sword-play make the backdrop story of California joining the Union bearable, but ultimately this by-the-numbers adventure is just a rental.

MOVIES	★ ★ ↗
FEATURES	★ ★

FFVII IMPROVEMENTS

by Adam Warren

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TRIBAL-PATTERN VINYLS

CHROME "SPINNAZ" RIMS

W2R07

BY POPULAR DEMAND, FF**VII** NOW FEATURES **MANY** MORE **CROSSDRESSING CLOUD** MISSIONS!

GOOD THING THIS ISN'T AT ALL CREEPY, HUH?

DIAMOND TIARA

BLONDE WIG

BLING!

SEXY COLOGNE

SOFT, SHIMMERY **SILK DRESS**

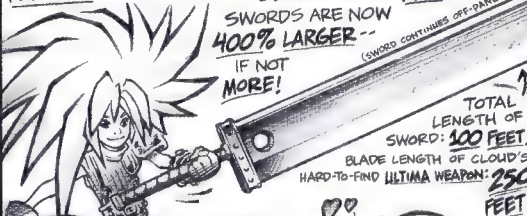LINGERIE
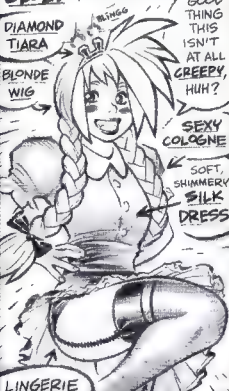
FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS: **CLOUD'S HAIR** AND SWORDS ARE NOW **400% LARGER**-- IF NOT MORE!
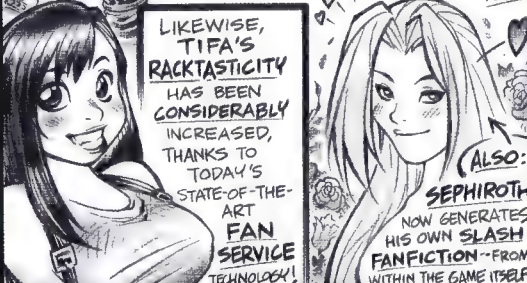
(SWORD CONTINUES OFF-PANEL)

TOTAL LENGTH OF SWORD: **100 FEET!**

BLADE LENGTH OF CLOUD'S HARD-TO-FIND **ULTIMA WEAPON: 250 FEET!**

LIKEWISE, **TIFA'S RACKTASTICITY** HAS BEEN **CONSIDERABLY** INCREASED, THANKS TO TODAY'S STATE-OF-THE-ART **FAN SERVICE** TECHNOLOGY!

ALSO: **SEPHIROTH** NOW GENERATES HIS OWN **SLASH FANFICTION**--FROM WITHIN THE GAME ITSELF!

TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and absorbing in the world of entertainment this month.

Freaks and Geeks – The Complete Series | DVD | Price: $70
We love the humor in films like *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up*, and *Superbad*, so naturally, we love the 1999 TV show *Freaks and Geeks*, too, since it features many of the same creative minds (like Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen).

Led Zeppelin: The Song Remains the Same (Collector's edition) | DVD | Price: $45
For fans of the decadent 70s, nothing says excess like this film footage of Led Zep's 1973 Madison Square Garden concert. With over 40 minutes of bonus concert footage added, plus a rare interview with Jimmy and Robert and lots of other goodies, this will definitely take you over the hills and far away.

Pete's Coffee & Tea | Beverage | Price: $4
Because it takes a lot of energy to make a magazine, we find ourselves in need of lots and lots of caffeine. Our old office had a (much beloved and sorely missed) Pete's Coffee machine, but for now, we have to grab our cups of joe on our way into work. Ken has one of their pastries every morning for breakfast.

Rock Stars Do The Dumbest Things | Book | Price: $15
Now that your *Rock Band* group has finally found the perfect outfit, you need to learn how to get free PR for your stunts. Find out how the Big Boys disappoint pairs of horny groupies, dance naked on a rival band's bar table, shoot the local nunnery's livestock, and do other "cool" things. It's a must-read for wannabe rockers.

Epiphone Moderne Guitar | Instrument | Price: $850-$2000
You can win a virtual model of this guitar by accomplishing certain feats in *Guitar Hero 3*, but Bill owns a real one. "I played a 1961 Gibson LPJ for about 30 years straight, but once I got my hands on this, it became my #1 guitar overnight!"

Hairspray | Blu-ray | Price: $40
John Travolta...in dresses and a fat suit...with a huge smile plastered on his face...singing and dancing a love duet with Christopher Walken. Even if you hate John Travolta, you can't look away. You just can't.

Rock Band Logo | Logos | Price: $50
You've argued all night long and have finally agreed that "The Flying Buttresses" is the perfect *Rock Band* name. Now you need a logo. Rockbandlogo.com, a company in England that designs professional logos, banners, and flyers might be a bit costly, but it sure beats spray-painting one of your Mom's sheets.

Taco Truck | Food | Price: $1 each
Every day at noon, a taco trunk parks on our street and serves authentic Mexican tacos (two small corn tortillas, meat, onion, cilantro, and lime) for a buck apiece! Yes, it comes in a truck, but a value like that... how can we resist?

Liverpool F.C. | Football (Soccer) Team | Price: Free
We needed a Premier League team to root for and didn't want to jump on the Manchester United or Chelsea bandwagon, so Liverpool F.C. (a once and future powerhouse with a lot of upside potential) is our new favorite soccer team. Go reds!

Enchanted | Movie | Price: $10 per ticket
Shh! Maybe no one will notice if I, Teresa, slip this into our Top 10 List. Since seeing this film, I've started cutting patterns out of my curtains (to make dresses), tacking up printouts of Patrick Dempsey and James Marsden, and serenading the rats in our office after everyone's left. I'm not deranged; I'm just hoping for my happily ever after.

Tomb Raider 8

First Look Preview

Lara Croft's next crusade pushes adventure gameplay—not just graphics—to new levels

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBA 2008 **GENRE:** Action Adventure
PUBLISHER: Eidos **DEVELOPER:** Crystal Dynamics
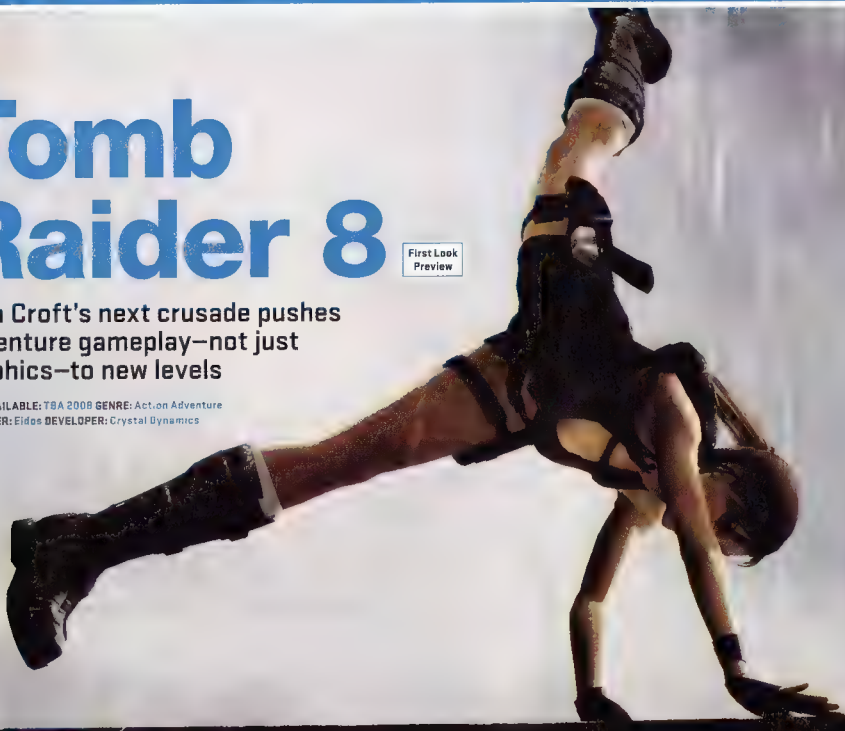
PS3 | P

When the *Tomb Raider* franchise was snatched away (or possibly rescued) from series creators Core Design and delivered into the eager hands of Crystal Dynamics, it required a near-complete overhaul. Fresh off a series of successful *Legacy of Kain* titles, Crystal Dynamics then delivered the goods with the superb *Tomb Raider: Legend*. The team succeeded in updating iconic heroine Lara Croft's looks and delivering a blend of imaginative puzzles, solid combat, much-need control changes, and a damned fine story. Many of the gameplay improvements—including some new mechanics—found their way into last year's PS2 redux of the very first game in the series. Building on this solid foundation, we're expecting the evolution on to PS3 to be so much more than a prettier version of *Legend*.

The Story So Far
Still tentatively titled *Tomb Raider 8*, the development team confirmed that it is set after the events of *Tomb Raider: Legend*, but doesn't necessarily run with or tie up any unresolved plot threads from that game. What we do know is that, contrary to intarwebz speculation, the game is not titled Tomb Raider: Underworld and that, while mysteries of the Mayan calendar and belief in an underworld ruled by the dead are part of the game, that's definitely not the extent of the adventure. In fact, Lara will be traveling around the globe once

again, handling the mythologies of her destinations, and connecting them to a larger, still top-secret, overall story. As a tease, the team promised that Lara will be going to one location that will have players saying "They really did that?!" We pushed for more, but could only get them to divulge that it's somewhere Lara would go if she could, and that it requires the might of the latest technology to pull off. Atlantis? Space? What's your best guess?

Love at First Sight

As the massive HD panel being used for our hands-off demo powered-up, we got our first glimpse of the new Lara; standing in dense jungle with ruins in the distance, rainwater ran down her clearly more detailed body. While many of the tweaks made to her appearance since *Legend* are subtle, they add up to a Lara that is the closest to looking like a real woman yet, and conveys the character's athleticism better than ever.

As our tour guides were quick to point out, Lara's moves have been freshly motion-captured for her eighth outing, hand-tweaked, and joined with an advanced animation blending system akin to that used in *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. So not only do her moves look more natural, they flow together just as you'd expect from a real person. It goes as far as her pushing foliage aside with both hands as she pass-

es through it, or only one if she's carrying something. The enemies she'll encounter have also benefited from the new animation approach; in this case, we witnessed her fighting poachers and panthers.

Speaking of Fighting

Among the many new mechanics introduced in *Legend* were Lara's close-quarters moves: launching off enemies' bodies, kicking them into the air, and just plain kicking them... below the belt. Moves of that sort will return, but she'll be able to employ some equally cool new tactics in battle. For one, she can target two enemies at once while using her trademark dual pistols, or any pair of one-handed weapons. She can also pick up objects (a pole in our demo) and club enemies... or throw it as a spear. More exciting yet, combat is being much more tightly integrated into the platformer elements, which is getting a boost as well. For instance, she'll be able to dual-target while perched on balance beams, and use a free hand to shoot enemies above and below while climbing—even on vertical columns.

About That Platforming

Much of the evolution in play mechanics we've witnessed thus far has to do with Lara's acrobatic traversal of levels. The game's creators have a simple design philosophy: "Would Lara be able to do this, given her skills?" So we now have

Don't mess. Man or beast, Lara has the moves and killer instinct to make quick work of whatever's in her way.

If only ancient civilizations had invented elevators...

Cut the radio chatter: *Legend* had Lara in constant communication with her support team. We'll still hear her chatting in *TR8*, but it won't be in a similar, almost "tip line" fashion.

PS3 | P

Lara works up a sweat running around the jungle.

free climbing where there are hand holds on walls, no-jump gaps where she simply reaches to the other side with one hand and pops over, jumping off and onto corners, climbing into a perch atop pillars, and the ability to not just swing from horizontal bars and poles, but also pull up and stand on them as platforms to jump from.

We've mentioned picking up objects as weapons... but those objects will often factor into platforming. The stick that could be swung or thrown? It can also be planted into a hole in the wall to create a makeshift swing pole in order to reach an otherwise inaccessible next area.

One of our favorite additions in *Legend*—Lara's grapple line—is back, and more useful. One puzzle-solving example we saw involved using leverage to force a block off the top of a pillar and through a breakable floor.

Shooting the grapple to a pole on the opposite side of the block, and moving Lara to the far right of the long platform she was on until line tension sends the stone cube sliding off.

Oh, yes... sliding. It was very rainy outside the Mayan ruins that made up the demo level. As the buildings were ruins, rain poured inside, sheeting down walls and across ledges Lara would need to traverse. As expected, she could jump and grab them, but would quickly slip off if not for a quick button press to secure her grip.

The Bike is Back

It had its own level in *Legend*, now Lara's motorcycle is set to play a more significant role in her latest adventure. It's now a tool in her adventuring arsenal that she'll frequently use to leap chasms and

traps on the way to tombs of the raiding variety. We got a taste of what to expect after Lara solved a puzzle involving the five "missing" days from the Mayan calendar (it only had 360) and opened the gateway to the underworld. She couldn't possibly get to it fast enough on foot before it resealed, so, while totally under our control, she dashed for the bike and tore down a previously traversed path littered with pits and traps. As she rocketed down the ramp and through the gate, an in-engine cinema kicked in, revealing what was at the end of the ramp (and our demo)—a spike pit. Fortunately for Lara, and everyone eagerly awaiting her return in 2008, she slid to a stop, and we were left asking when we could see more of what is sure to be one of PS3's biggest games this year. — Randy Nelson

Bringing the Adventure to Life

From storyboard and sketches to painted reference and final in-game locale, the design progression of *TR8*'s world show just how close games are able to meet the original ideas of the artistic minds behind them.
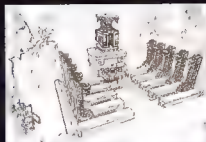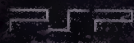

Gates of Xibalba – Sketch

Gates of Xibalba – Painting

Gates of Xibalba – Final in-game level

Developer Illusion Softworks is based in Brno, Czech Republic.

Having family in important places helps ensure you can get equipped for the job. Feeling lucky, now, punk?

The script was written by Daniel Vavra, the acclaimed writer of *Mafia I*. His aim with *Mafia II* was to paint a darker picture that shows the grittier aspects of the mob.

PS3 | P

You'll work with your mob buddies, and the scumbags on the street will beat a hasty retreat.

This is NOT New York, just in case you were wondering. NOT New York, we say. Not. No. Stop it.

Mafia II
First Look Preview

You wanna be a part of this family?

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Late 2008 **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks

This, quite simply, is a sequel you want to see. Remember how *The Godfather* was the greatest movie you ever saw…until you saw *The Godfather Part II*? While it's a little early to apply those accolades, our initial anticipation of *Mafia II* is enough to start the thoughts swirling around the old grey matter. Really, just look at the screenshots. Yes, these are screenshots from an early build of the game. Interested now?

While this new game is officially a sequel, its relationship to the original release is virtually nil. According to 2K Games producer Denby Grace, you should expect new characters and a new story line that takes place what's described as "decades after the events of the original." Since the original *Mafia* shipped in 2002 there's a good chance many gamers, particularly PlayStation owners, missed the open-world shenanigans set in the fictional world of Lost Heaven.

The sequel transports you to Emerald City, where you step into the shoes of Vito Scalleta, a second-generation Italian American growing up in poverty in the 50s. Like many in his predicament, the mob represents the glamorous way out of the slums. Alongside a childhood friend called Joe (if he's wearing a red shirt when the game starts, who's betting he makes it 'til the end?), Vito gets in with the local don and the table is set to build a business. Emerald City is estimated to cover about 10 square miles, so the environment is tight and the intention is to ensure it is well detailed. Grace said they're looking to recreate the feeling of being in a city during the "golden era" of gangland America.

Details are pretty tight as we go to press, but when you take a look at the screenshots, and get a sense of the impact of the original game now delivered on next-gen tech, the potential is clear to see.

This studio, based in the Czech Republic, has enjoyed impressive critical acclaim for its WWII shooter, *Hidden and Dangerous*. *Mafia*, similarly, illustrated a keen game-design eye, and this sequel is already packing the visuals and buzz to put it atop our "must-see" list. So while Vito Scalleta's story in Emerald City is barely begun, you can be sure we'll be working the paparazzi rounds snapping every move and grabbing every nugget of information for the issues ahead.

Rob Smith

You will learn to walk with honor

You will gain the wisdom
to command with decisive resolve

You will take your place
among the most elite warriors on earth.

If you have what it takes to make it

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THE FEW. THE PROUD.

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One look. One thought. One moment of awesome force-wielding.

With great force power..

...comes spectacular chain lightning.

Star Wars:

The Force Unleashed

First Look Preview

Feel the power of a whole new Force

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: LucasArts

Star Wars fans know that—midichlorians notwithstanding—the Force is awesome. It's awesome as it matures through six movies, and wonderful to wield in the numerous games, particularly when you could take it online for the first time in *Dark Forces: Jedi Knight* on the PC (ah, the glory days). Now, take the power of the Force, stick it with the "cream" and "clear" and maybe a shot of JGH (Jedi Growth Hormone), and unleash those amped-up powers. Therein lies the inspiration for the title of the new *Star Wars* game,

and indeed the next chapter in the time line.

From the glimpse we've seen of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, this premise not only has the potential to generate frenzied excitement among the *Star Wars* fan community, but could also deliver incredible, epic action moments. That bold pre-release statement is inspired by witnessing the underlying technology blended with the brash design of the powers you'll wield. Just a mission or two into the adventure
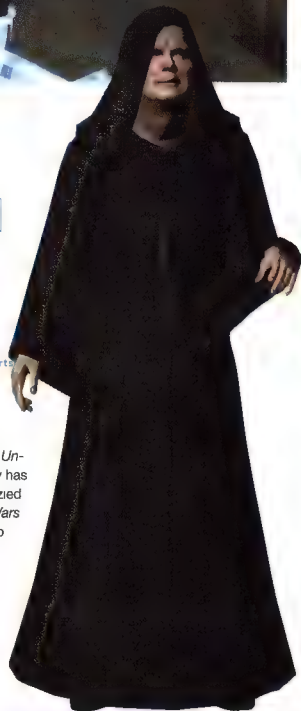
and you'll use your Force power to grab a Tie fighter (like, a full-size one, not some model) in a space station dock and fling it at enemies.

How. Frickin'. Cool. Is. That?

It looks as good as it sounds, thanks to the combined impact of NaturalMotion's euphoria, and the Havok engine. This technology—according to project lead Haden Blackman—enables a virtually limitless array of player moves, dodges, and actions, blended with the same unscripted reactions from enemies. The upshot is large battle scenes that you should be able to fight several times and never see the same canned animation move. That will be enhanced by a pay-off camera that will trigger automatically in situations that deserve a slo-mo replay, but can also be controlled if you set up your own planned assault. Set pieces like this are likely to figure heavily throughout *The Force Unleashed* as you play out events that help explain events that occurred between Episodes 3 and 4.

The Next Installment

Since the movies are now done, any *Star Wars* story fixes will have to come from playing the games. In *The Force Unleashed*, you'll play through events that bring you to the start of the classic Episode 4. You take the role of Darth Vader's secret apprentice; a Jedi-powered youth with his own history

(revealed throughout the game), and with the potential to utilize the Force in a variety of ways. A very neat story twist ensures that you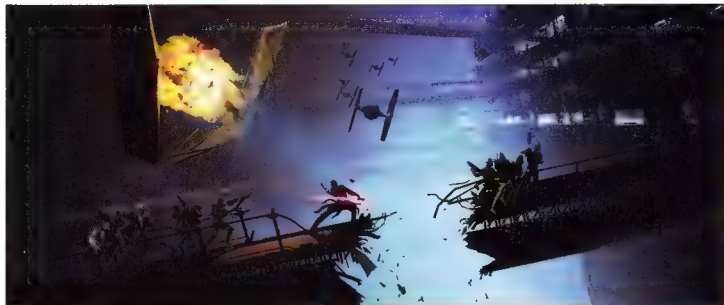're able to test out your powers on stormtroopers. Given the secret nature of your apprenticeship, when you're sent to perform missions around the galaxy it's imperative that you leave no witnesses. None. Including those you might consider to be on your side. So right from the outset you're flinging Tie fighters into stormtroopers, and lobbing them like bowling balls against their comrades—now mere skittles in these Force-fueled situations.

Vader's instructions will send you around the galaxy, to places such as Felucia, the fungus planet that played a brief role in Episode 3. There you'll hunt down Shaak-Ti and be required to utilize some of the lightsaber and Force power
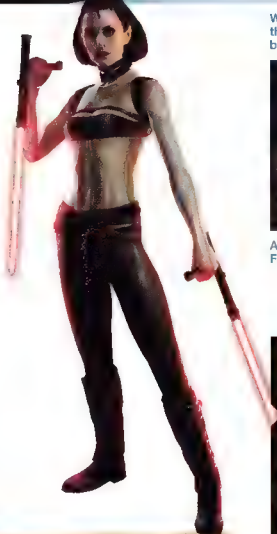
When the Force is unleashed, the gameplay moments should be truly memorable.

AT-ST's, 0
Force-wielding Jedi, 1.

Either *The Mummy* just returned, or it really stinks on the junk planet Raxus Prime.

Unique Levels

While it's easy to get fixated on the technology-pushing visuals and events in the next-generation version, it's important to note that the PS2 and PSP versions are getting their own special attention. Developed by Australia-based Krome Studios, both the PS2 and PSP versions will include a level that's not a part of the PS3 adventure. This unique mission takes place in the Jedi Temple on Coruscant, and features a confrontation with Darth Desolous. How this event fits into the broader storyline will be revealed later, but it's refreshing to see a concerted effort made to support the other platforms that aren't garnering the excited next-gen coverage.

SWTFU looks sweet on PS2, too.

Boss battles will test your Jedi abilities to deliver devastating combos.

The full gamut of Force powers is represented, both as Force Grip, Force Repulse, Force Lightning...

Open wide and say "Aaaaarrrrgggghhh!" Now turn and cough

PS3 | P

combos that you'll ultimately have to master to be successful. Another location revealed thus far is Raxus Prime, a junk planet where you'll hunt the Jedi Kasdin and do battle using some really unique combat mechanics that utilize the environment as well as your own weapon and Force power skills.

Whatever you do in the game, as missions are completed, you'll earn experience points that you can apply to Force powers in order to ramp up the effectiveness of your existing powers, or learn whole new skills. The full gamut of Force powers is represented, such as Force Grip, Force Repulse, and Force Lightning. Each can be improved so that

eventually, for example, you'll be able to unleash chain lightning to devastating effect.

We've only had a taster of what *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* will offer, and it's enough. The Force focus doesn't just take what you've seen in the movies, but amps up the intensity to give you an incredibly powerful feeling. It seems even at this early stage to be a hugely effective and impactful gameplay tactic, and we'll be bringing you more details on what to expect in the coming months.

Rob Smith
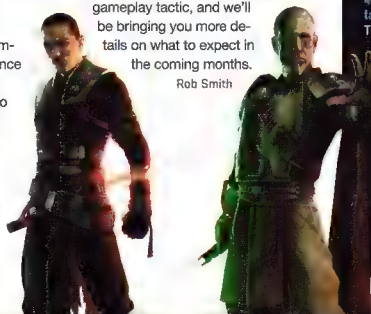
Five Tenets of Star Wars Game Design

Project Lead Haden Blackman outlined five crucial questions that the designers asked themselves at every meeting as a method of ensuring the vision remains on track. How would you answer these questions for the *Star Wars* game you want to play?

1. What's the vision for The Force?
For this game it's totally reimagined, amped up, and unleashed with a new ferocity that is still under your control.

2. What is the core gameplay?
Essentially, what's fun? And that's basically kicking everyone's ass using the Force.

3. Who are you?
Though it took a lot of time through the development cycle to get to this answer, the role as Darth Vader's apprentice works with sublime impact to the overall *Star Wars* story.

4. When does the game take place?
The time between the conclusion of Episode 3 and the start of Episode 4 is pretty quite significant, and therefore is ripe to mine for exciting activities as Vader emerges as a power.

5. What's the theme of the story?
The answer to that is redemption. The role as Darth Vader's puppet is just the beginning, and you'll likely face a range of crucial future-shifting decisions along the way.

BECAUSE BOMB-SNIFFING DOGS DON'T WORK WELL UNDERWATER.

HUNTING SEASON OPENS 2.05.08

Prepare to fight in the sunshine. That, and to stop any terrorist mean enough to bother the fine folks at Christo Market.

Rainbow Six:

Vegas 2

First Look Preview

Ubisoft gambles on Vegas one more time

PS3 · P

No time to stop for a drink.

A room needs clearing? Call in Team Rainbow.

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2008 GENRE: First-Person Shooter PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal

Anyone who didn't expect a sequel to *Rainbow Six: Vegas* probably never finished the game, what with its "To Be Continued" ending and all. And why not? After fighting our way from Mexico to the micro-pulse cliffhanger on the Nevada Dam, Team Rainbow still has some unfinished business—what "fight" was chief baddie Irena Morales huffing about while sucking on her last breath? And did that backstabbing schmuck Gabriel survive the helicopter crash in the lake? An even more nagging question was when the sequel would be coming and where it would take place; now we know. Come Spring 2008, we're going back to Vegas, baby.

Rainbow Six: Vegas 2 will be the sixth game in the series to appear on a Sony console, and should arrive just in time to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the franchise proper. With the original *RS:V* development team at Ubisoft Montreal deploying for another go 'round in Sin City, *RS:V2* aims to take all the best elements of the first—the spot-on third-person cover system, d-pad squad commands, regenerating health, tough-as-nails enemy AI, and killer fast-roping—and make them even better. That goes double for multiplayer, which is a tall order considering how balanced, intense, and addictive the online play for *RS:V* was (and still is). Looking at the early assets for

the game we think you'll agree that Ubi Montreal appears to be more than up to the task.

Even though team Rainbow is headed back to Vegas, don't expect everything to be the way you left it. First off, while your teammates Michael Walker and Jung Park are back, you aren't. That is, instead of playing as Logan Keller (the main dewd from *RS:V*), you'll be jumping inside a supa-operative goldenboy (or girl, more on that in a second) named Bishop. This character will actually be fully customizable with both male and female gender options, which means you can go all *GTA* and send your elite terrorist-killah onto the strip sporting a tank top and chaps (no

Your teammates will leapfrog, covering one another as they move in on targets.

word on pink Mohawks just yet, but we'll keep you posted).

At first glance, we were a bit surprised to be going back to the desert so quickly, although Rainbow Six Kansas City just isn't as sexy. *RS:V2*'s story line, we're told, will be both a prequel and sequel to *RS:V*, though it sounds more like a Version 2.0—you'll jump into the *RS:V* timeline before Keller's deployment to Mexico and from there will keep pace with his travails, only you will be playing different missions in a variety of environments (including more missions in broad daylight). And instead of just using the video feeds that propelled *RS:V*'s story progression, *RS:V2* will feature interactive cut scenes. Add to that jump-in co-op capability (you can join a friend's campaign game in-progress at any point) and more fully-equipped and challenging AI (expect to take on terrorists toting thermal vision,

night vision, and shields), and the single-player campaign should be a whole new take on *Vegas*.

On the multiplayer side, if you're anything like us, you probably know the Calypso Casino map better than your own house after playing so much *RS:V* online. If so, you'll rejoice over the 11 new maps planned to ship with the game, which include some updated classics from *RS* days of yore. Several of the maps will be smaller and geared more toward tighter, choke-point style face-offs. There will also be two new game modes and the return of P.E.C. (Persistent Elite Creation). There's a new twist this time around—all experience you'll earn through another new system called A.C.E.S. (Advanced Combat Enhancements and Specialization) will be persistently shared between single-player and multiplayer, meaning you'll earn experience

and advance your character's death-dealing skills playing through either the story (alone or in co-op) or online in match-making. So far there are at least three experience-earning categories—close-quarters battle, marksmanship, and assault—that will all net you beaucoup points and rewards, such as new weapons.

In the end, we're looking forward to seeing what new twists *RS:V2* offers. A note: the premiere trailer shown to announce *RS:V2* at this year's Spike VGA's was pretty weaksauce and left much to be desired—it was heavy on cheesy, James Bond-ish voice-over and live action shots, with about a nanosecond of gameplay shown. Here's hoping that the ad campaign, and ultimately the game, lives up to the Royal Flush we're expecting from a sequel to one of the best games in the *Rainbow Six* franchise. Casey Lynch

ZOMG! Those dewds have shieldz!

RS: Good & Bad

It's hard to believe that almost 10 years have passed since the original *Rainbow Six* game debuted on the PS1. Since then, the *RS* franchise has covered a lot of ground with three games released on PS1 and two on PS2—some good, and some really bad. Here's a quick look back at the good, the bad, and the butt fugly.

The Good
By far the most accomplished console *Rainbow Six* game, *Vegas* replaced mission planning with simple squad commands and a more frenetic-paced white-knuckle multiplayer mode designed with the console player in mind.

The Bad
Can you say *Rogue Spear*? Yuck! The mission planning was ruined by the lack of waypoint control and the friendly AI sucked. We don't know how many times we tried the Pandora Trigger mission only to get to the hostages and find all our backup dead. Poop.

The Butt Fugly
If there was ever a textbook example of how not to port a game, it would be the original *Rainbow Six* on PS1. Everything looked wonky—the buildings, the terrorists, even the hostages were so unsightly we were tempted to put them out of their polygonally challenged misery with a hollow-point through the noggin.

Even though the PS3 version of *RS:V* came out six months after the Xbox 360 edition, here's hoping the PS3 version of *RS:V2* comes out around the same time this time around

Close- and mid-range firing are Lang's specialties

Destructible environments is one of the game's highlights.

Yeah, it's about teamwork, but missile-sized weapons certainly don't hurt.

The conflicts take place across 13 different maps.

Conflict: Denied Ops

Hands-On Preview

Don't ask us about having multiplayer coverage, we'll deny it

PS3 AVAILABLE: February 12, 2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Eidos DEVELOPER: Pivotal Games

Everyone knows that first-person shooters and co-operative gameplay are all the rage. So, it's no surprise that Pivotal Games revamped the tactical third-person gameplay with FPS controls and a co-op buddy system for *Conflict: Denied Ops*, the fifth game (and first next-generation title) in the *Conflict* franchise. Pivotal has also done away with its established four-person squad, shelving longtime standby characters John Bradley and co. (from *Conflict: Desert Storm I & II* and *Conflict: Global Terror*).

Instead, an all-new narrative follows a two-man squad of CIA Special Activities Division (S.A.D.) operatives, Messrs. Graves and Lang, a sniper and a machine gun specialist, respectively.

Conflict: Denied Ops centers around a series of covert paramilitary operations only suited for deniable operatives (denied ops for short), the covert soldiers with no traceable link to the U.S. government. Because Graves and Lang are specialists with their weapons, each is limited to using only those from their own areas of expertise. Instead of swapping between different gun classes, you'll literally swap between characters when you need to change from short- and mid-range stopping power (Lang) to long-range sniping (Graves). This element carries over into the online play, where you choosing between playing as Graves or Lang, which is really just choosing between a heavy weapons and sniping class.

The multiplayer modes let you and up to 16 players (or up to four players split-screen) get fraggy on the PlayStation Network in three different online modes—deathmatch, team deathmatch and conquest. You'll be able to toggle back and forth between Graves and Lang (or classes) at each respawn by tapping triangle.

The deathmatch modes follow standard operating procedure; deathmatch is a free-for-all frag-fest, while team deathmatch offers your typical red versus blue format. Conquest, on the other hand, is more a capture-the-flag objective-based game, with five flags spread out across each conquest map waiting to be taken and held by each team. In a twist, you can respawn close to the flag by snapping through the level using the left analog stick until that flag is displayed. The

Bloom lighting gives games that "next gen" feel. Just don't overdo it.

camera will fly through the level to the flag location indicating its relative location within the level.

One thing we haven't confirmed yet is how heavily the explosive items we saw in the single-player campaign will play into multiplayer. For our money, we'd love to see the potential of fire-bombs strewn all around the levels, waiting for a well-placed round to light up the soldier dumb enough to stand near one.

Casey Lynch

Missing Persons?

2005's *Conflict: Global Terror* was the first in the series to offer online multiplayer, but it was limited to four-player deathmatch games. Before that, co-op games were limited to split-screen play. *Global Terror* also set up a story line with longtime sniper character Paul Foley going MIA that many fans hoped would be continued in the fifth game.

Does this court remind anyone else of *Grim Fandango*'s opening setting?

Top tip: keep your eye on the ball.

Psychedelic tennis courts are the way to go.

One character we'd love to see, but probably won't, is the Harrier our G.vn Daytona USA. But, hey, it was a playable "character" in the Sega Saturn title *Fighters Megamix*, so who knows for sure?

Sega Superstars Tennis

First Look
Preview

Sega serves up fan love

PS3/PS2 AVAILABLE: Spring 2008 GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Sumo Digital

PS3 | P
PS2 | P

We're not sure whether it's the bang-up job the studio did porting *OutRun 2* to PS2 and PSP, or its excellent *Virtua Tennis 3* (we're betting on the latter), but Sega definitely dropped a dream project on U.K. developer, Sumo Digital. The Sumo crew is a big fan of Sega, which is good to know considering it's set to create some true fan service in *Sega Superstars Tennis*.

Coming to PS3 and PS2, the game will feature 15 playable characters from some of Sega's most famous franchises. Revealed so far are Sonic the Hedgehog, Dr. Eggman, and Amy Rose from the *Sonic* games, Ulala from *Space Channel 5*, AiAi from *Super Monkey Ball*, Amigo from *Samba de Amigo*, and NiGHTS. The cast of Wimbledon would-bes will each have their own signature moves, in addition to the standard lobs and power smashes.

The on-court rivalries will logically play out in locales based on Sega titles. So far, they include Green Hill Zone from *Sonic the Hedgehog*, Carnival Park from *Samba de Amigo*, and a stage each from *Space Channel 5*, *House of the Dead*, and *NiGHTS*.

Sega is promising yet-to-be-revealed modes exclusive to each version of the game, but we already know one advantage the PS3 version will have: online play.

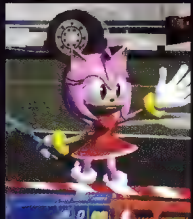Be sure to check back as we go hands-on with *Sega Superstar Tennis* in a future issue.

Randy Nelson

Mama bear, papa bear, and baby bear. Aw, how cute.

PS2, Love

Not to be outdone by its next-gen sibling, the PS2 version of *SST* is not only looking pretty spiffy, but, as Sega has promised, will feature its own exclusive gameplay modes. And while it may not feature online play, it will let four players play pairs locally.
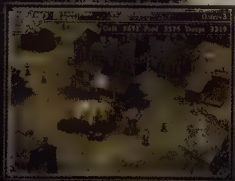
be the
weapon.

become the
hero.

darkS

The brand-new engine (named Frostbite) clearly packs a punch with some incredibly detailed foliage, as well as the character models and guns.

PS3 | P

Battlefield: Bad Company

The massive (PC) online franchise brings its frag-fest to PS3

First Look
Preview

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring GENRE. Online action PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: DICE

Not too far in the future the world is at war. The good part of this disappointing global news is that it handily serves as the setting for the latest *Battlefield* game from Sweden's DICE, the studio that really put cooperative team-based military multiplayer gaming on the map when it launched this franchise on the PC. Though PlayStation gamers may think they know what to expect (*Battlefield: Modern Combat* was released in 2005 for PlayStation 2), this latest turn kicks the action, the visuals, and the brutality into the next generation, with a much-anticipated release on PS3.

We got the latest word on what to expect from Senior Producer Karl-Magnus Troedsson, who is leading the *Battlefield* charge at the Stockholm-based team.

PTOM: What's evolved from the PS2 outing (*Modern Combat*) to take advantage of the PS3?
KMT: Firstly, it's the great amount of destruction that we now have in the environments. About 90% is now completely destructible which will give many new opportunities for emergent gameplay.

The second thing is that this is the first *Battlefield* to feature a true, story-driven single-player campaign. Players will venture on a private endeavor for gold in a campaign spanning three big conflicts. The core mechanics of the offline campaign is very similar to the online one, being based on the true sandbox experience that still sets *Battlefield* apart from many other competitors.

PTOM: Will the single-player mode serve as essentially a training tutorial, to get soldiers prepped for intense online multiplayer battles?

KMT: The single-player campaign is built as a standalone experience but can definitely also be played to prepare players before going online. You can use the offline mode to learn to drive specific vehicles or perhaps to hone specific skills with certain weapons. But mostly we hope people will play it because it's fun, and be captivated by the unique story we're offering. *Battlefield: Bad Company* definitely has a different attitude than many other games, which has been key throughout the entire development. We didn't want to create another run-of-the-mill story but
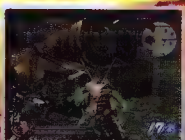
DICE's first game was a pinball simulator *Pinball Dreams* released n° 1992

instead try something new in the shooter genre.

PTOM: What's the background to Preston, the character you play in single-player?
KMT: In *Battlefield: Bad Company* you play Preston Marlowe, an ordinary American soldier who's just transferred to B Company. B, or Bad Company as it usually is called, is where the army rakes together the troublemakers deemed expendable into a high turnover outfit. Here Preston gets to know three other characters in his new squad: Sarge, Haggard, and Sweetwater. They've all ended up in Bad Company for their own reasons but they have one thing in common: they're tired of taking orders and being sent on suicidal missions. So when the opportunity arises to leave the army behind and chase after a treasure of gold bullion, they jump at the idea. Doing so will mean breaking all the rules in the book, but since it's standing between them and early retirement, they see little choice.

PTOM: Are most of the battlefields in Eastern Europe?

KMT: The game starts out in Europe during a fictional conflict, but the squad's chase for the gold will take them on an adventure within the war across a total of three theaters, passing through Russia, and leaving them in the Middle East.

PTOM: What has the Cell processing power allowed you to achieve?
KMT: Frostbite, our new game engine, is a direct result of us wanting to harness the power of the PS3. It's always a struggle to develop new tech while creating the game at the same time, but we've come a long way.

PTOM: Any plans to support Sixaxis controls for any element on the battlefield? And what about rumble for DualShock 3?
KMT: It won't support Sixaxis controls, but will utilize the rumble support of the DualShock 3.

PTOM: How many players online? And how are the classes organized?
KMT: The new game mode will support 24 players online. We're

Hazy sun glistens off the surface of the lake; looks like a perfect day to wage war on a gold bullion run.

also setting up all the servers in the background to ensure a solid online experience. And as in all *Battlefield* games, *Battlefield: Bad Company* will contain huge amounts of weapons, vehicles, and gadgets. Some are unlocked through the extensive persistence in the game and others are available from the start. There will be five classes with very unique loadouts, and depending on your play style and what situations

you're about to get into you need to choose carefully. Your choice of main weapon will be customizable and some of the gadgets have to be unlocked to be used. While on the battlefield you can easily change the weapons at hand by looting from other soldiers, or simply using some of the many stationary weapons and vehicles in the sandbox.

Rob Smith

The destructible environment means you'll be busy blowing stuff up all over the maps… and then trying to look decidedly innocent.
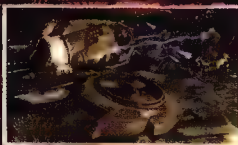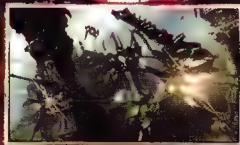
PS3 | P

This is why they say, "Don't drink and drive," folks. Just don't do it.

This scene definitely takes place in Hollywood... How could we tell?
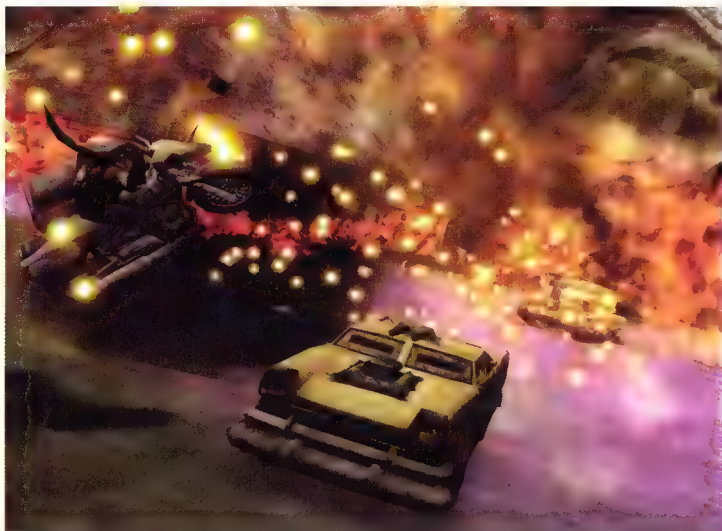
No animals were harmed in the making of that bike...

Although Extra Twisted won't feature only *Head-On* play (like the old *Metal*), Black: Online on its loads of "turbo, two players will still be able to go, ahem, head-on via split-screen.

Twisted Metal: Head-On: Extra Twisted Edition

First Look Preview

A surprise gift for *Metal* fans from the series' creator

PS2 | P

PS2 AVAILABLE: Spring 2008 GENRE: Car Combat PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Eat, Sleep, Play

How excited can you really get over a PSP game that's coming to PS2? Actually quite a bit in the case of *Twisted Metal: Head-On: Extra Twisted Edition* (say that fast five times!). Developed by newly formed Eat, Sleep, Play—a studio founded by *Twisted Metal* and *God of War* creator David Jaffe, who's also overseeing this game's design—this biggie-sizing of one of PSP's U.S.–launch games is receiving a variety of "extra twisted" additions.

The original *Twisted Metal* established the "car combat" genre, and this game carries the torch high. As you'd hope, the *Head-On* part of the game gives you access to 18 vehicles, each with their own special attacks. Like the PSP version, this portion of *Extra Twisted Edition* will feature combat arenas in Los Angeles, Egypt, Tokyo, and Paris, in addition to a yet-to-be-revealed new locale exclusive to PS2. Game modes for single-player will include Story, with its series of driving tests; Challenge, where you chose the arena, opponents, and rules; and Endurance, where you face an unending onslaught of rival drivers, and try to survive as long as possible.

Eat, Sleep, Play is spit-polishing the game's visuals for PS2, adding new lighting effects, higher resolution textures, and upping the car detail.

But that's just scratching the surface of improvements.

Titled *Twisted Metal: Lost*, the second component of the game will feature 16 vehicles and four never-before-seen levels originally intended for *Twisted Metal: Black 2. TM: Lost* will be joined by "Sweet Tour," a mode where you control the evil clown and car combatant Sweet Tooth on foot, exploring a brand-new level and finding trivia bits from the developers. The bonus treatment will continue with a documentary on the series and a look at deleted endings from the first game, making this an odds-on must-have for fans of the original games and newcomers alike. Randy Nelson

Sweet Tooth Walking

We can only imagine the kind of whacky (or disturbing) goodies Dave Jaffe and crew have cooked up for Sweet Tooth's "Sweet Tour" on-foot level.

Developer Digital Extremes has created first-person games in its past, and Project Lead Steve Sinclair described the shift to third-person as "pretty damn different."

PS3 | P

Dark Sector should be ready with Accomplishment trophies for PlayStation Home rooms as soon as the online environment is released.

Dark Sector

In-Depth Preview

Glaive: [gleyv] noun, archaic, a sword or broadsword (dictionary.com)

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: D3 Publisher DEVELOPER: Digital Extremes

Several years ago, with most of its time devoted to developing *Unreal* projects alongside Epic Games, Digital Extremes was also plotting a few projects of its own. Company president James Schmalz had a poster in his office depicting a sci-fi dude in a black, form-fitting suit looking over his shoulder. That was the beginnings of the game *Dark Sector*.

But that was probably six years ago, maybe more. Since then, Digital Extremes branched out on its own to develop the distinctly

average *Pariah* (two or three cool gameplay ideas mired in a sandpit of mediocre first-person shooterdom). Over time, *Dark Sector*'s original sci-fi game design has morphed into a tale set in the recent past, with a twist that comes courtesy of the Soviet navy discovering and raising a sunken submarine.

The game opens in 1987, in black and white. According to Project Lead Steve Sinclair, this is to help emphasize the metamorphosis that occurs when your character, Hayden Tenno, is

> **"** A significant change to the combat system has helped give an extra visceral edge to the action: dual-wielding **"**

stabbed in the shoulder, exposing him to the weird virus that guides the game's central plot.

The chief villain—shadow agency director Dwight Schultz—has a sidekick who, if not directly descended from *Unreal*'s Skaarj, is certainly on the same evolutionary branch. This creature's blade transforms Hayden's arm, and seems to imbue the unique Glaive missile weapon with evolving powers. The Glaive is a three-sharp-pronged boomerang that can be locked on to targets to relieve them of limbs and life. Since the last time we saw *Dark Sector* in motion, a significant change to the combat system has helped give an extra visceral edge to the action: dual-wielding. With a revolver in your left hand, you can now act, react, and be effective while the Glaive is fired off and returns to your right arm.

While the Glaive will serve as your primary weapon, you'll also be able to pick up shotguns and automatic weapons, and improve their effectiveness with add-ons purchased with money you find or earn during missions. This should play into a tactical level as you progress through missions, selecting upgrades that suit your play style. Your Glaive gets upgraded along the way, too, with electricity, fire, and freeze functions that serve as puzzle solutions as well as creative methods of destroying enemies.

Finishing moves in which you close in on a stunned enemy for a blood-soaked slo-mo coup d'état could become a signature for *Dark Sector*. The third-person perspective lets you see all the balletic creativity that goes into animating death throws (and death throes). According to Sinclair, some of these moves emerged from a happy accident in an early build of the engine, where the Glaive hitting a target would cause it to thrash and spew blood seemingly by the gallon. This cool effect then made it into the design!

Visually, *Dark Sector* displays several slick features. During boss fights, elements of the environment are destroyed and enemy soldiers exhibit tactical awareness, ducking behind cover, and using flanking maneuvers to get a bead. Though some of the puzzles appear a bit hokey (throw your Glaive at a flame to set it on fire, and use the fire to burn the bizarre foliage crippling an elevator) the action sequences seem to have plenty of variety in their flavors.

A last-second glimpse of Hayden taking down and then piloting a sweet-looking mech-like vehicle hinted at a depth of content of which we're only now just scratching the surface. The game has already spent a considerable amount of time in development, but we're hoping that the fine tuning of the last few months culminates in a unique and stylish action game for PS3.   Rob Smith

Using cover, leaping over obstacles, and executing dodge maneuvers in the open gives *Dark Sector* a more tactical angle than a straight first-person run-and-gunner.

Advanced Glaive moves take advantage of Sixaxis control. You use the Sixaxis to bend/curl/shimmy the Glaive around objects like an enemy's shield to get a clean hit.

We don't know what that is, and it looks like Hayden didn't want to find out.
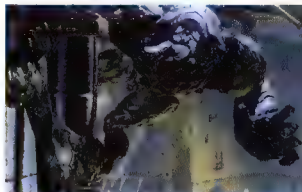
Er...boo...?

PlayStation Gallery

Updates, sneak peeks, work-in-progress

God of War:

Chains of Olympus

PSP AVAILABLE: March 2008
GENRE: Action Adventure
PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Ready at Dawn

Kratos leaps from the frying pan and into the fire in his latest, most easily portable adventure. Actually, in this case, the leap is from Hades to a place even lower in Greek mythology, Tartarus. Our hands-on time with the game so far has us jazzed for the final release. If the competent creative noggins at Ready At Dawn keep this up, the game will be on par with its console counterparts. It'll certainly sound the part, featuring a score by *God of War* and *God of War II* composer, Gerard Marino. RN
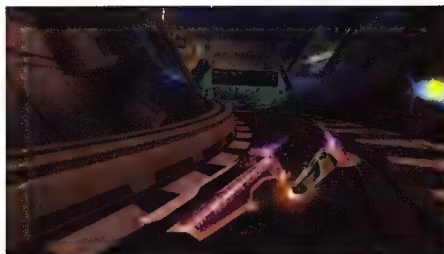
WipEout Pulse

PSP AVAILABLE: TBA
GENRE: Racing PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCE Liverpool Studio

Sony's fantastically, futuristically fast maglev racing series roars back onto PSP with some nifty new features and a racecourse reset. *Pulse* will feature 12 brand-new courses to hurtle through, and a new Mag-Strip track surface that enables them to feature loops, corkscrews, and hair-raising 90-degree drops. This second portable installment in the series will also allow you to take screenshots both during and after races to share with friends, and listen to custom soundtracks by means of user-stored MP3s on the memory stick. All we can ask for now is for SCE Liverpool to use the PSP's full CPU speed, ensuring silky smooth 60fps thrills. RN
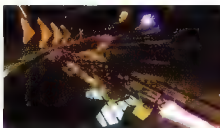
Rainbow Islands Evolution

PSP AVAILABLE: January 2008 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment DEVELOPER: Marvelous Entertainment

The title couldn't say it better: PSP owners are in for a true evolution of the classic coin-op, *Rainbow Islands*. The original *Rainbow Islands* was actually a sequel to another arcade favorite, *Bubble Bobble*, with its dino characters, Bub and Bob, freed from reptilian form and able to shoot rainbows. Cute much? That mechanic will be put to use on PSP, as the duo takes on an evil record label polluting the islands with their tunes. Rainbows can be used as makeshift platforms, or to send baddies packing; or, if you play four-player Ad Hoc, against your… erm… friends. RN

Turok

PS3 AVAILABLE: February 2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Touchstone DEVELOPER: Propaganda Games

We took the multiplayer for a spin and discovered a really intriguing twist on the standard template for team-based first-person action games. The dinosaurs. Though the level- and weapon design are original and stylish in their own right, chasing down enemies only to be mugged by a raptor leaping for your throat is an unexpected twist. In practice it seems to make team communication vital, as it's easy to be distracted by the fauna and miss an enemy sneaking up with a knife to execute a visceral killing blow. We'll have the full review next month. RS
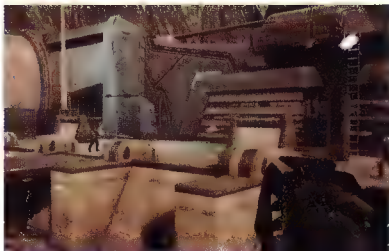
Patapon

PSP AVAILABLE: February 2008 GENRE: Rhythm Action
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCE Japan Studio

It was nearly love at first sight for this quirky PSP game, but now we're leaning more toward fond affection. Featuring visual design by noted French abstract artist Rolito, *Patapon* is marching its way to the U.S. double-time. What makes the game endearing is not just the army you command, but the way you do so, using the PSP's buttons to tap out six different drum beats, each issuing a different strategic command to your tiny forces. The beat will go on. RN
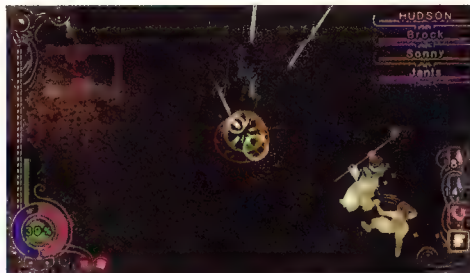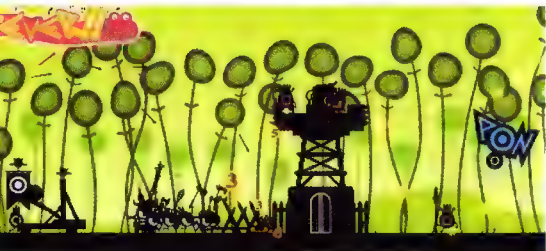
Dungeon Explorer:

Warriors of the Ancient Arts

PSP AVAILABLE: February 2008
GENRE: Action RPG
PUBLISHER: Hudson Entertainment, Inc DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft Co , LTB

From what we've seen so far, *Dungeon Explorer: Warriors of the Ancient Arts* will have all your typical action RPG fare: quests, a magic system robust enough to allow for group attacks, a job system that lets you swap combat styles, a far-reaching story about the nature of evil, and immense amounts of crafting and weapon customization. However, we were most surprised and delighted by the quick load times, an element almost unheard of in the realm of PSP RPGs. That alone makes us eager to play the game. TD

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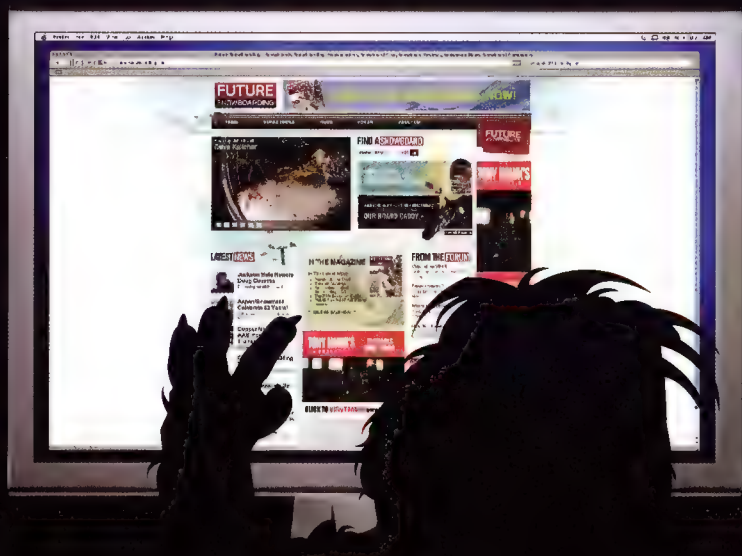
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CRISIS CORE:
FINAL FAN

An intimate story about a world we already love

By Teresa Dun

Fans of *Final Fantasy VII* have been begging for ten years—yes, an entire *decade*—for a true resolution to the *FFVII* story. The full-length film wasn't enough, nor it seems were the anime, spin-off game, or the sky-high pile of fan fiction. Fans *still* demanded more. Now, Square Enix has finally responded to their pleas. Before Cloud ever became a mercenary, a man named Zack Fair (in the screens to the left) was in SOLDIER. *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* tells his story.

Platform: PSP

AVAILABLE:
March 25, 2008

GENRE: Action RPG

PUBLISHER:
Square Enix

TASY VII

NAME: CLOUD STRIFE
AGE: 13
HOME TOWN: NIBELHEIM

We already know that Cloud works for Shinra. *Crisis Core* reveals more about his mysterious origins.
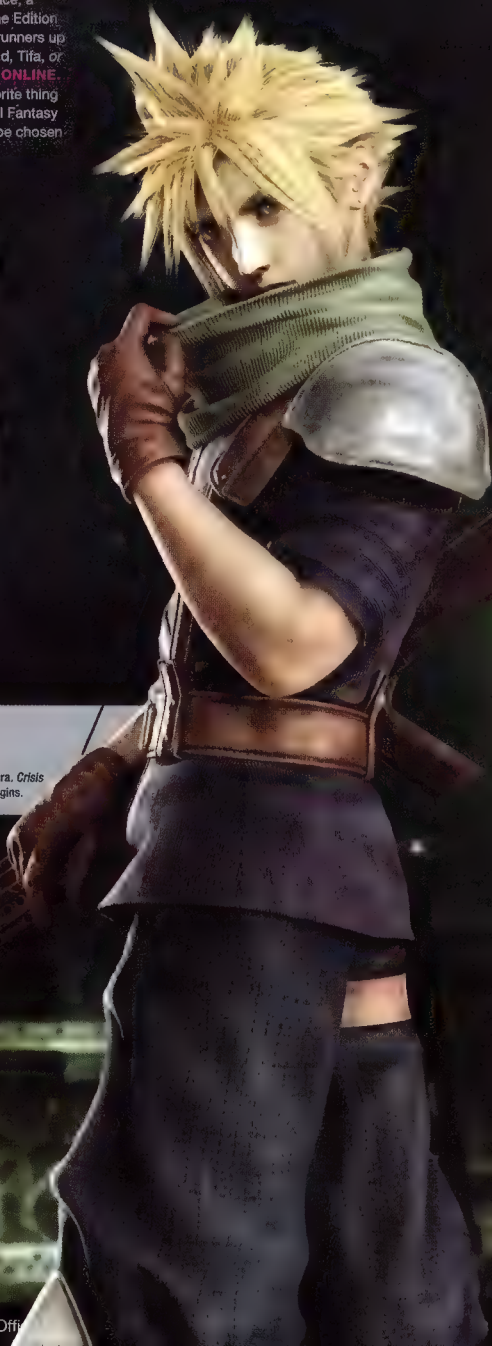
BUCKLE UP AS SONIC RIDERS RETURNS WITH NEW ZERO-G STUNTS.
GET VERTICAL ON WALLS OR GRIND ON ANYTHING THAT FLOATS IN THE WILDEST RACING EXPERIENCE YET!

E very now and then, our sensory organs are hit with a nostalgic *FFVII* twang and we achingly remember Aerith's light-filled garden, Cloud cross-dressing in the Midgar markets, the planetarium of Red XIII's grandfather, chocobos racing on psychedelic tracks, Genova's face encased in glass, Sephiroth's tortured expressions, and the music that played whenever Rufus was present. We recall those moments not because they are significant in themselves, but because they represent an experience that we treasure, long for, and yes, still occasionally have dreams about.

What was it that made *FFVII* so special? The settings, plot, and characters? The materia and turn-based combat? The graphics that were so revolutionary for its time? Or was it the sheer number of secrets, the little touches of humor, and the ability to buff your characters to insane degrees...and then fight still more powerful enemies? And the most important question of all: will *Crisis Core* be able to live up to expectations set by its predecessor?

Occasionally, you'll see special clips in the DMW.

Modulating Phases are like "Limit Breaks."

Not quite a continuation

A prequel of *FFVII*, *Crisis Core* takes place seven years before *FFVII* began (See what they did there? Seven years? *Final Fantasy VII*?), and it will feature the story of Zack Fair. Some of the more familiar characters from the original game will make cameos (and some, more than cameos, but our lips are sealed) and we anticipate a lot of plot puzzles from *FFVII* to finally be resolved. Primarily, *Crisis Core* will be about Zack and his fellow soldiers. We have a hunch that the story will be just as epic as the first, though perhaps more personal and hopefully, revealing. Check out short bios scattered around these pages to find out more about the protagonists.

NAME: ZACK FAIR
AGE: 16
HOMETOWN: GONGAGA
With bright dreams of becoming a hero, Zack begins the game hoping to achieve SOLDIER 1st Class. Zack's personality is a mix of optimism and recklessness, which occasionally causes headaches for his mentor, Angeal. Later in the game, Zack falls through the roof of a church in Sector 5 Slums...

Good-natured, wise, and honorable, Angeal is SOLDIER 1st Class and Zack's mentor and role model. He grew up in the countryside and was raised to treasure pride above all. But what inscrutable actions will his philosophy cause him to do?

Double duty

Crisis Core will feature two modes: the 20-hour or so long-story mode (which weaves a complex plot), and the optional but much longer Mission mode (which you'll access through save points during the main game). If you want to obtain summons (Ifrit, Odin, and the rest will all have gorgeous CG intros), shopping address cards (they'll let you access shops while in dungeons), better materia and accessories, and a ton of other secrets, you'll want to invest a good chunk of time in missions; from what we've seen, it'll take dozens of hours to make your character godly, and even then, the later enemies are supposedly still very, very tough… Does that remind anyone else of Emerald and Ruby?

Familiar summons are given CG treatments.

A summon?
Who called it out?

Do you feel lucky?

Instead of turn-based combat where you pick and choose spells and special attacks, *Crisis Core* will feature a new D.M.W. (Digital Mind Wave) system. The core combat is action-based and you'll still be able to cast spells manually, but summons, limit breaks, and even leveling up will all be determined by chance. Don't worry, you'll find items to help you turn the tables in your favor farther in the game.

Angeal's childhood friend and fellow SOLDIER 1st Class, Genesis revolts from Shinra early in the game and takes a slew of lower-ranked Soldiers with him. His athletic prowess and handsome looks compare with Sephiroth's, though Genesis never got the same level of attention. He is a devoted student of the epic poem, LOVELESS.

FFVII HISTORY 101

Whether you're a *Final Fantasy VII* virgin or just someone whose memory neurons aren't firing as fast as they should be, you may not recall the events in what some consider the best *Final Fantasy* ever made. In which case, we recommend you obtain a copy of the classic and play (or replay) the game. But if that's not possible, we've put together a quick-and-dirty rehash on who—and in some cases, what—you should know before playing *Crisis Core*, and why they're important.

Cloud Strife: Spiky blonde hair. Huge sword. Quiet among people but strong and fearless in battle. Cloud Strife, the protagonist of *FFVII*, is a man of complex mystery. He grew up in Nibelheim with childhood friend Tifa Lockhart, joined Shinra's SOLDIER unit, told everyone back home that he achieved the coveted and highly skilled rank of 1st Class mako-enhanced SOLDIER. He then became a mercenary, eventually joining the underground group AVALANCHE, whose sole goal is to take down Shinra, Cloud's ex-employer. Throughout most of *FFVII*, Cloud seems a bit…off. He blacks out, hears voices, and even falls into an extended vegetative state near the end of the game. By the end of the game, it becomes known that Cloud lied about his SOLDIER status—he never made it to 1st Class—but he did work closely with a man named Zack Fair.

Zack Fair: Though Zack is the main dude in *Crisis Core*, he was barely mentioned in *FFVII*. All we know from that game is that his identity is closely but mysteriously linked to Cloud's memories in SOLDIER. In the original game, Zack only appears during a flashback, which reveals to Cloud what truly happened during a night in his hometown of Nibelheim when Sephiroth torched the place. *Last Order: Final Fantasy VII*, which appears on the *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* collector's edition DVD, is an animation of this flashback.

Sephiroth: The man in black, with the flowing silver hair, sunken eyes, impossibly long sword, and devil-may-care attitude. At one point, Sephiroth was considered a war hero and looked upon with admiration for his strength and skill. Then, events took a sour turn during a visit to a mako reactor in Nibelheim. Sephiroth developed some, ahem, mommy issues…and burned the entire village. From there, he becomes the deeply troubled yet somewhat sympathetic villain of *FFVII*. The iconic image of his back retreating into a wall of flame entered the cultural zeitgeist and plastered itself as wallpaper across 1997 computer desktops everywhere.

Aerith Gainsborough: Near the beginning of *FFVII*, Cloud falls through the roof of a church and comes face to face with the beautiful Aerith Gainsborough, who is nurturing a garden of flowers in Midgar's slums. She joins him because he reminds her of someone from her past… and we soon learn that she's the last Cetra, or "Ancient," a race of the first inhabitants of the planet. We hate to give spoilers, but halfway through the game, Sephiroth kills Aerith—her infamous death scene is a moment of pathos that was shared by gamers all over the world, and it led to the composition of one of Nobuo Uematsu's most beautiful pieces, "Aerith's Theme." Thinking about how much time and effort it took to level her up until she got the Great Gospel Limit Break, not to mention our emotional attachment to her sweet personality, still brings us to tears.

Tifa Lockhart: Tifa grew up with Cloud in Nibelheim, and when he left home to join the Shinra Army, he told her he intended to rise to the elite rank of SOLDIER, 1st Class before he returned. She made him promise to come rescue her whenever she was in trouble. She witnesses the death of her father and many villagers in Nibelheim when Sephiroth destroys the town, and she grows to hate Shinra and SOLDIER because of it. During *FFVII* she has a friendly rivalry with Aerith for Cloud's affection.

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magazeen

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Gained in translation

U.S. *Crisis Core* purchasers will be able to play the game on Hard mode, an option that doesn't exist in the Japanese version. We heard some of the voiceovers, too. While the typical "dub lag" is present for now (where characters make emphatic hand motions three seconds after they've already finished their sentence), we found the voiceovers so far to be well suited to the characters' expressive faces and lively dialogue. Oh, and we should mention, we adore what we've seen of the characterization so far.

The command menu (bottom right) lets you access spells, items, and attacks.

NAME : SEPHIROTH
AGE : ABOUT 25
HOMETOWN : NIBELHEIM

The hero of heroes and the best of the best, Sephiroth is distinguished even among the other members of SOLDIER 1st Class, a fact Shinra uses to garner public support. Because of his lonely upbringing (he has no memory of his parents or hometown), Sephiroth isolaates himself, and only lets his guard down around his best friends, Angeal and Genesis.

We dare to hope

Set in one of the most beloved universes in RPG history, *Crisis Core* will need to jump through tremendous hoops to please *FFVII* fans. From what we've seen of the story and characters so far, we believe we have little to fear—in the two chapters we played, *Crisis Core* handled both with depth and focus. We're a little wary of the changes to the battle system, though. By "modernizing" combat—solo action–based instead of party turn–based—the game might not offer the strategizing we loved in its predecessor. Then again, coupled with the DMW, it might add a much-needed fresh face to what might seem today to be a musty and outdated combat system. The jury's still out, but we have high, high hopes.

NAME : AERITH GAINSBOROUGH
AGE : 16
HOMETOWN : ICICLE INN

If you don't know Aerith's role in this game, we won't spoil it for you. But she's present, and just as cheerful and adorable as ever!

FFVII HISTORY 101

The Turks: Shinra special agents who take care of any dirty work, like kidnapping and sabotage. Tseng, Reno, and Rude are the Turks who run across Cloud and his friends the most frequently, and they eventually develop a grudging respect for each other, despite being on opposing sides.

Shinra: Sephiroth is the main villain in *FFVII*, but Shinra is the force that helped create him. They are an evil energy company that sucks up mako energy—destroying the planet in the process—and uses it to conduct experiments on humans, even to the extent of injecting it into fetuses still in the womb. Through the discovery of what they believed to be a Cetra called Jenova deep inside the planet, they extracted Jenova cells and used these in experimentation as well.

Professor Hojo: The main scientist heading Shinra's research is a twisted individual who performed diabolical experiments on his wife and unborn son.

Buster Sword: The Buster Sword is not a character, per se, but a weapon that is as much a part of Cloud's identity in *FFVII* as his spiky blond hair. During his *FFVII* victory poses with the oversized sword, Cloud manages to helicopter it over his head without cutting any of his bits off. Considering the lineage of the Buster Sword, of all things, is revealed in *Crisis Core*, you know the fan service is out of control. And don't you want to join the fun?

The Creator Roundtable

How does the PlayStation look to some of the guys tasked with imagining the games you'll play in the future? Here are a few things they've learned so far, and what you can expect.

The Creators

Evan Wells
Co-President,
Naughty Dog

Christophe Balestra
Co-President,
Naughty Dog
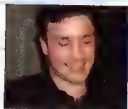
NAUGHTY DOG

Brian Hastings
Chief Creative Officer,
Insomniac Games

Al Hastings
Chief Architect,
Insomniac Games

INSOMNIAC

Naughty Dog has wrapped up and shipped out *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. Insomniac Games has done the same with *Resistance: Fall of Man* and then *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction*. All three games garnered terrific critical acclaim. Both companies are building again for their next projects that won't arrive on PlayStation 3 for a couple of years. So what lessons learned during development will be taken into the future? What can gamers expect these developers to be focused on in the years ahead? We posed the questions.

What have you learned from working with the hardware that is central to design decisions being made for future projects?

Evan It took us a while to get our heads wrapped around the technology. We made a lot of mistakes along the way, learned a lot of things that didn't work well before we found the ones that did. Now that we have this game under our belt we can hit the ground running, and I'm really excited to see what we can do on our next game.

Al It's such a different beast. Graphics are put together a lot differently. Lighting is done differently. Everyone is relearning what they do. Now we're at a point where everyone has some comfort level that they know what they're doing. But that said, it's more like we see where we want to go, where before we were fumbling about. From the end-users point of view, in the next couple of years it's more the dynamics of the game that will be improved, everything from dynamic lighting to things that affect gameplay. And maybe you could say there's a third phase after that, where the technology has settled down enough that it's the creative team's chance to shine. Maybe that third generation is where we'll see the best games.

It's been reported that *Uncharted* tapped just 30% of the Cell processor. What does 50% or 100% mean?

Evan The Cell processor feels like a black hole. We keep throwing more and more at it and it doesn't break a sweat. You can do an insane amount of collision checks, and it really benefits gameplay to have that accurate a collision model.

Brian It's a really big step from the way we've been doing things for the past 10 years. Going to parallel processing you've got to rethink the way you do everything.

Evan For teams like ourselves, who were heads-down on the PS2, we weren't involved in PC development so all these things came along like parallel processing and pixel shaders, and suddenly they came along in PS3 and we had to take a crash course in all the new graphics and technology.

Brian Once you take advantage of parallel processing you find a windfall of processor savings.

> The Cell processor feels like a black hole. We keep throwing more and more at it and it doesn't break a sweat.
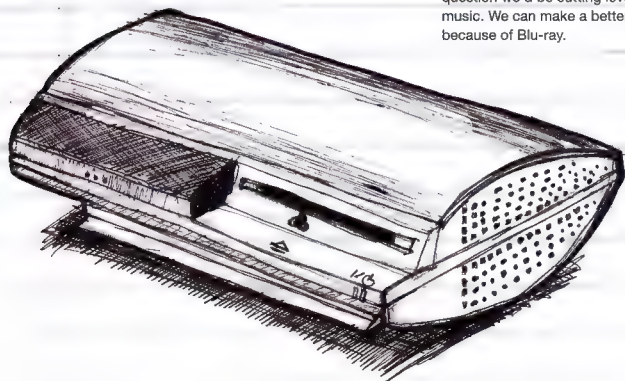> —Evan

> It's such a different beast. Graphics are put together a lot differently. Lighting is done differently. Everyone is relearning what they do. —Al

When you look at the graphics in *Ratchet*, can it actually get more detailed than that?

Al There's a lot of room, but it's maybe right that in terms of scene complexity we're really at the point of diminishing returns, where if we threw more polygons at something no one's really going to notice. At this point it's all about lighting and shading and shadowing that's really going to bring it to another level of realism.

Evan Lighting is unbelievably important. It makes a world of difference from something that's unlit or lit with one light, or a key light is set up incorrectly, it completely changes the look of the game.

Does Blu-ray make a difference?

Christophe A couple of times we got scared because data wouldn't even fit on a Blu-ray. I didn't think it would be possible to get to that point! But everything is bigger. We use more, bigger textures, all the languages are on one disc. We could have done the same game without Blu-ray, but not to the same quality. More than just Blu-ray it's a combination of the hard drive and Blu-ray that we can take advantage of.

Al On *Resistance* we didn't take advantage of what comes with that combination. We did a better job on *Ratchet*. And we got to a point where we overflowed the Blu-ray.

Brian I don't think there's any question we'd be cutting levels and music. We can make a better game because of Blu-ray.

How come only a few games have appeared running at 1080p at 60 frames per second?

Al It's all about trade-offs. If you choose to run at 30Hz you have twice as much time to do twice as much stuff. Five or ten years from now the same question will still exist. Even at the end of PS3, probably most games will choose to trade off to 30Hz and 720p, as that will always give you the most bang for your buck for most types of games.

Evan It does depend on the type of game. You see a lot of cool games on PSN like *Pixel Junk* that really take advantage of 1080p. It's great that developers have that option, if you're making a game that's not pushing the system with lighting and shadowing

Brian So many people have muddied the waters by saying they're rendering at 1080p, but they're not, they're upscaling to 1080p.

Al A consumer buying a 1080p TV will get their money's worth…games running at 720p will look great on that TV set.

If the games you just shipped were made three years down the road, what would be different?

Al The graphics would look more polished, but I can imagine Joe Public might not be able to point to that and say "wow, that's so much better." The areas where there's most room for improvement are the dynamics of the game. Dynamics of light and shadows make a big difference when you're playing to the realness of the feeling, but when you look at a screenshot, it might not show that.

Evan The example of *God of War II* is perfect for a game that comes out late. They are no longer worrying about *how* they want to do something, but concentrating on *what* they want to do. You can be much more creative when that's where your focus is, and you'll see games more spectacular and more fantastic because all the talent will go on what you want to do, not how you do it.

A couple of times we got scared because data wouldn't even fit on a Blu-ray. I didn't think it would be possible to get to that point!
—Christophe

Blu-ray Disc

Has the hardware changed your perception of the kind of games you want to make?

Evan Definitely. The fact that PS3 has an internet connection built-in that we didn't have on PS2 certainly makes making an online game more attractive than it ever was in the past.

Al PSN also brings us the opportunity to do something smaller, so we can do something more risky, and more inventive.

Evan One area that's attractive to me is in the transition period when you're setting up and haven't done enough pre-production on the next game, and you've got some idle time. You could throw a small group of people on a title like that and bang it out in the time the rest of the team is in pre-production on the big game.

Brian You guys don't have idle time!

What's the impact and potential of Home in your future projects, beyond Accomplishments and Trophies?

Al It's something we're thinking about quite a lot. The people developing Home have planned that this has to be an organic process. You build a flexible, extensible world—and we're keeping a flexible mindset as to how we'll incorporate it into our games.

Evan We're viewing it as an extension of the experience—not so much the gameplay, but letting players delve deeper into the universe. Learn more about the characters and backstory. You can extend that experience almost like extras on a DVD.

Brian We want to find ways to get people to group, buddy up, find ways to connect more. It seems like it's happening outside, on message-boards, but Home is a step in the right direction to feel more like you're hanging out, talking, and you feel like from five minutes of that you got a connection, made a friend, more so than spending ten hours killing each other.

> The example of *God of War II* is perfect for a game that comes out late. They are no longer worrying about how they want to do something, but concentrating on what they want to do. —Evan

So are massively multiplayer games in your development planning future?

Evan It's possible [laughs] but don't expect an announcement anytime soon! It's a huge endeavor, the bar is so high, and the competition is huge. It's something that's very interesting, but we have very little experience in it. But I don't know if or when we'll make that leap.

Brian We're trying to get that license to *World of Warcraft*!

Win 'Em All

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Win 'Em All

You can win each of our Games of the Year — on PS3, PS2, and PSP — by entering this simple contest*.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
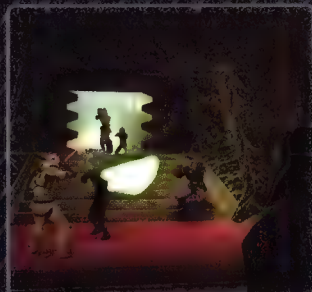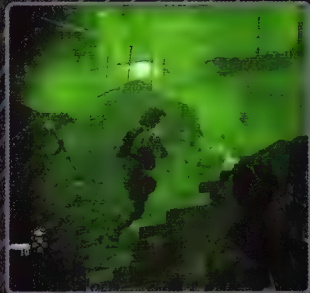
PS3

PSP

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GAMES
OF THE
YEAR
'07

PS2

The envelopes, please. Weeks of deliberation culminated in a hotly-debated collection of finalists. And from there just one winner was selected for each platform. But you know the names, you know the games, and So without further ado (as the rules of award-giving compel us to say), we present the first annual PlayStation: The Official Magazine Game of the Year Awards. <cue applause and anticipation>

>

GAME OF THE YEAR '07

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
Developer: Infinity Ward
Publisher: Activision

Rock Band
Developer: Harmonix
Publisher: Electronic Arts
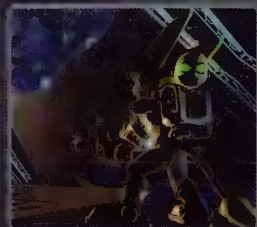
Ratchet & Clank Future
Developer: Insomniac Games
Publisher: SCEA

Winner: Assassin's Creed
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Publisher: Ubisoft

Unreal Tournament III
Developer: Epic Games
Publisher: Midway

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

GAME OF THE YEAR '07

Dark Knight

But he's still a heretic!

Winner: Final Fantasy Tactics: War of the Lions
Developer: Square-Enix
Publisher: Square-Enix
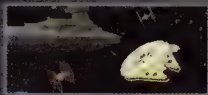
Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron
Developer: Rebellion
Publisher: LucasArts

Silent Hill Origins
Developer: Climax Studios
Publisher: Konami

Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow
Developer: Sony Bend
Publisher: SCEA
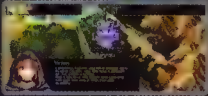
Puzzle Quest
Developer: Vicious Cycle
Publisher: D3 Publisher

Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3
Developer: Atlus Co.
Publisher: Atlus Co.

Tomb Raider: Anniversary
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Publisher: Eidos
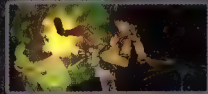
Rogue Galaxy
Developer: Level-5
Publisher: SCE
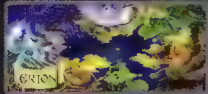
Odin Sphere
Developer: Vanillaware
Publisher: Atlus

PLAYSTATION 2

GAME OF THE YEAR '07

Winner: God of War II
Developer: SCE Santa Monica
Publisher: SCEA

Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Next, everyone gets a controller. Finally, the **kids win.** This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

www.ESRB.org

Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice | Hardware

RATINGS

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL**
An excellent game that takes its genre to new heights.

★★★★ **GREAT**
Not flawless, but a truly great game and among the best in its genre.

★★★ **OKAY**
An overall positive experience for fans of the genre or subject matter.

★★ **POOR**
Suffers from several major flaws that really damage the experience.

★ **AWFUL**
Not worth your time or money.

GAME of the month

Unreal Tournament III p82

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

2007 was a phenomenal year for games. We pick our faves.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

FAVORITE GAME OF 2007: The quality bar was suddenly raised later in the year. I've always had a soft spot for the *Burnout* franchise, and *Paradise* is incredible fun. Same too with the *Half-Life* franchise, making *Orange Box* a big time-sink. But I didn't play anything this year quite like *Assassin's Creed*. Not perfect, but original, stylish, and hopefully the shape of games to come on PS3.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *The Orange Box*

NOW PLAYING: *Burnout Paradise, UTIII, The Orange Box, Worldwide Soccer Manager (PC)*

RANDY NELSON
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

FAVORITE GAME OF 2007: There's no question in my mind that *God of War II* is the year's best game. Visually, story-wise, and gameplay-wise, it's totally epic, mind-blowing, and one of the best games ever for any system, right up there with the Metal Gears.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Unreal Tournament III, Pursuit Force 2, Burnout Paradise*

NOW PLAYING: *Burnout Paradise, UTIII, Rock Band*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

FAVORITE GAME OF 2007: The game with the biggest "woooah" effect has to be Portal. It was short, clever, and chock full of excellent puzzles (and music). Plus, cake is yummy. Now I'm on a search for a life sized Weighted Companion Cube to be my buddy

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Pixel Junk Monsters*

NOW PLAYING: *Guitar Hero III, Assassin's Creed, ~~World of Warcraft~~*

CASEY LYNCH
FREELANCE WRITER

FAVORITE GAME OF 2007: Between the hair-on-fire intense singleplayer campaign to the perk-laden, RPG like multiplayer, *CoD 4* is easily my favorite game of 2007.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *March Madness 08, College Hoops 2K8, Medal of Honor: Airborne, Star Trek: Conquest, Alien vs Predator: Requiem*

NOW PLAYING: *Burnout Paradise, Call of Duty 4, Rock Band, Devil May Cry 4*

CAMERON LEWIS
FREELANCE WRITER

FAVORITE GAME OF 2007: *Portal*. A wonderful concept, an artfully constructed difficulty ramp, a uniquely hilarious tone, a satisfying climax, and an "advanced" follow-up remix for dessert... As close to perfection as I'm ever likely to see, despite its short length

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Atari Classics Evolved*

NOW PLAYING: *Medal of Honor Heroes 2, Assassin's Creed*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

FAVORITE GAME OF 2007: *FIFA 08* is where I fell hard for the long sleeve Liverpool jersey. I was putting in a match a day but it wasn't until a challenge where I was forced to play a position player (midfielder Xabi Alonso) and scored that I was totally sold.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: N/A.

NOW PLAYING: Gosh, maybe something with the word soccer in it.

Back in 1998 I did the first print review of the original Half-Life for PC Accelerator magazine. I gave it 11 out of 10.

Facing off against striders is a terrifying ordeal, but resistance fighters will help you out.

The Orange Box

PS3 | R

Five games. One box. Unmissable.

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen to Mature PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: Valve

Team Fortress 2 has its own unique visual flavor.

It's won awards by the truckload. It's cited in the upper echelons of every Greatest Games of All-Time list since 1999. It's been released in so many packages, collections, and compendiums that most PC gamers probably own it about three times over. It is, of course, *Half-Life*, and it has primarily earned these plaudits on the PC. So, if you've been a dyed-in-the-wool PlayStation gamer, and haven't paid much attention between *Metal Gear* and *Final Fantasy*, *The Orange Box* is a guaranteed, bona fide, must-have, must-play.
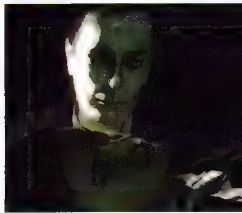
The weird name refers to the packaging, since it was clearly difficult to come up with a collective noun that neatly encapsulated all five products. Half-Life 2 and Friends? Nah. The Black Mesa

Stylish icons point to the exit as you use the blue and gold portals to move around.

Driving makeshift vehicles is so much easier when you don't have headcrabs in your face.

What is that dirty old man thinking? Answers to the usual address!

Alyx and Eli exhibit terrific digital chemistry.

Quintet? Ugh. Though released on other platforms already, it's probably the greatest value for PlayStation owners who may not have had the chance to try *Half-Life 2* and *Episode 1* before. Given that as a standalone game, *Half-Life 2* is an incredible first-person action experience—worth $60 from any self-respecting shooter fan on its own—you can probably see where this is leading.

Rounding out the collection is *Episode 1* (previously available for PC), the brand-new *Episode 2* single-player story continuation, online multiplayer shooter *Team Fortress 2*, and the revolutionary puzzler, *Portal*. And still, it's only $60 for all of them.

Half-Life 2 is a truly superb shooter that ably handles the tough task of sequelizing arguably the best PC game of all time. It picks up the story of scientist Gordon Freeman and the world gone crazy after he accidentally opened an interdimensional rift in the original. It might not answer all the questions the series' legion of fans were after, but its tight narrative, spectacular set-piece moments, and expert pacing ensure a thoroughly memorable experience. The puzzles punctuating traumatic action situations ensure that both your brain and your trigger finger are tested. Pat head, rub stomach—you can do it.

The distinctly stylized world of *Half-Life 2* maintains all its trademark visual panache in the port to PlayStation 3. The texture detail is impressive and the architecture of

the cityscapes is suitably foreboding. The sound, both in the voices of NPCs and intricately paced music track, is absolutely outstanding. To play in the world of *Half-Life 2* is to give in to its draw and lose yourself for as long as you can hog the TV.

In Episode 1 the story brings sidekick/love interest (surely not Gordon…he's so…quiet) Alyx Vance along for the ride. This episode introduces a few new gameplay dynamics that blend puzzle-solving with first-person action badassedry. The enhanced gravity gun serves not only as an incredible tool to manipulate the environment, but picking up enemies and swinging them around in a brazen showcase of rag doll

physics technology is fun through the entire game. At roughly eight to ten hours of gameplay, in addition to the 20-some of Half-Life 2, already the gameplay content pool in this package is stretching the seams.

It goes further with Episode 2, which pushes Gordon and Alyx's story still further (and deeper). Once again the set-piece moments are impressive, but it's in this chapter that the technology (or optimization) caught up with the translation from PC to PS3. Though we didn't see some of the significant pauses and frame rate dips that have been reported, when the screen fills with creatures, aiming and moving suddenly crawls. The glitch is distress-

A Heavy Gunner and a Spy prepare for battle on one of *TF2*'s expertly-balanced multiplayer maps.

Moments ago, this building was intact. But attention from a strider guarantees the debris will start flying.

Last on the list is *Team Fortress 2*, the cartoon-styled online multiplayer frag-fest. The visuals don't gel with the rest of the *Half-Life* legacy, but if that trade-off was to help frame-rates and gameplay, then good call, it worked. Red versus blue teams of up to eight players per side fight basic capture-the-flag or control-point game modes on some supremely well-balanced maps. The game is about team play, so be prepared to work and even communicate with your mates. The range of class types provides gamers of all stripes a chance to play a vital role. Each class also feels very different in how it plays. The Heavy Gunner is slow and sluggish (but his machine-gun is devastating and he'll take a beating before going down). The Spy is fast but weak, but can kill an enemy with one quick stab to the back. Each class requires time to find its nuances and best practices before going online to face the wrath of the unwashed masses.

Actually, in our experience, the teamplay was surprisingly pleasant. No swearing, no offensive name-calling. Just good clean fragging. Over a wireless network, I also didn't experience any major lag problems. The maps load at a steady pace, but warping was pretty minimal. Of course, your mileage there will vary with the nuances of your own network setup.

For PlayStation gamers who might not have played these games on other platforms, *The Orange Box* is the best value package available on PS3. The core *Half-Life 2* game and episodes are superb. *Team Fortress 2* is absolutely rock-solid online multiplayer. Incredibly, the icing on the cake is *Portal*. At the same time challenging, charming, disarming, disturbing, and compelling, it defines a new gameplay mechanic that we'll no doubt see more of in the future. But for right now, even while frame-rate glitches are disappointing, it's simply impossible to ignore the incredible value of this total package. If you're a PS3 gamer who didn't bother with *Half-Life* on PS2 (and who can blame you?), but who delights at first-person shooters crafted by masters of the art, then *The Orange Box* is as no-brainer, slam-dunk, must-buy, cliché-riddled, gush-laden, five-star shoo-in as you will find. Possibly ever. **Rob Smith**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

> **...if you've been a dyed-in-the-wool PlayStation gamer, and haven't paid much attention between *Metal Gear* and *Final Fantasy*, *The Orange Box* is a guaranteed, bona fide, must-have, must-play.**

PS3 | R

ing when each set-piece battle is so intense, and often so original, that you hope it plays out smoothly so you can enjoy fighting off towering striders alongside fellow resistance fighters without the PS3 coughing and spluttering.

Back to the content, and there's no such performance anxiety in *Portal*, one of the most brilliantly original game designs we've seen for a while. The concept is actually pretty tricky, particularly for the spatial awareness-impaired, as you fire a portal gun into surfaces to open a movement method out of a seemingly sealed room. Explaining it is no easier than understanding it at first. *Portal* is a puzzle game made up of 19 challenges through which you're guided by a moderator who might just be a little technologically crazy. But the com-

mentary, as occasionally inane as it may be, adds real flair to what would otherwise be your female character firing holes in walls and manipulating the movement of energy balls.

The tests themselves get progressively more complex, though the ramp-up is pretty steady. I was stunned at how stumped I'd feel in front of a particular challenge (I'm no puzzle gamer) only to suddenly figure out the solution, and then execute it the first time. It delivered more satisfaction in those fleeting moments than many bigger standalone games achieve at their conclusion. Even watching someone else try the challenges is entertaining, as falling through holes in the ceiling and using the momentum to propel yourself at high velocity to a seemingly inaccessible ledge looks almost as good as it feels. Depending on your puzzle skills, blended with the motor skills also needed in a few areas where quick controller manipulation may slow your progress, *Portal* can take anything from two hours to maybe six hours to complete. The biggest reason that time is relevant is that if you start *Portal*, you owe it to yourself as a gamer (and to the designers for their creativity) to see the payoff. Many people have commented that they would pay $60 for *Portal* alone. I'm not in that camp, but even as a non-puzzle gamer, I was hooked and didn't stop until I was finished.

As the Sniper delivers his brand of justice from afar, the Spy makes his mark up close and personal.

You'll be sticking it to criminals while riding motorcycles, jet skis, and other zippy one-man crafts.

The number and variety of vehicles you'll be commandeering in the name of the law is impressive.

Here, you and a partner double up on a baddie.

Pursuit Force:

Extreme Justice

Bigger, better, pursuit-ier

PSP PRICE. $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: BigBig Studios

The original *Pursuit Force* remains one of our top PSP games. With its intense vehicle chases, movie-like car-leaping-while-shooting, and stand-out visual style, we were smitten by the blend of new tech and old-school gameplay taken to all-new levels. *Extreme Justice* is, in many ways, more of the same. And that's good. But it's also more. More vehicles (you'll be chasing crooks while piloting jet skis, hovercrafts, buses, and more), more weapons, and more players.

The missions have more variety this time around. Rather than simply running down (then gunning down) gangs, the gameplay mix changes, often during missions. One moment you're in hot pursuit, the next you're manning a turret for support or chasing them down on foot (which has been vastly improved over the first game – BigBig really nailed the third-person controls).

Many players found the original game a tad too challenging, and this, too, has been addressed by means of a much more forgiving difficulty ramp-up. Don't get us wrong; it's no cakewalk. But it won't have you throwing your PSP slim, either.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of the first game was the boss battles. They've been ratcheted up for the sequel, offering bigger and badder vehicle-borne bosses, whether on the road or even in the air as you fight your way along the outside of a plane.

BigBig has our respect for working some visual magic that all but eliminates the fast-action blurring inherent with the PSP's LCD, while still being a blisteringly fast game. These guys (and gals) obviously have a great grasp of the hardware, as this more detailed sequel proves.

Two welcome additions round out this quality PSP offering. The first is four-player Ad Hoc wireless support in four modes: an on-foot shootout, flat-out pursuit, pursuit where you'll need to ram your opponents to take them

down (à la Taito's classic coin-op *Chase HQ*), and a 4X4 offroad battle. The second new aspect is the promise of downloadable missions, extending what is already an 18-plus hour game.

We think we made some sort of pledge regarding games with "extreme" in the title some time ago, but we're giving *Extreme Justice* a 'get out of extreme jail free' card because it's just such a blast to play.   Randy Nelson

★★★★✩

With its "bosses" and enemy waves, the game is reminiscent of classic shooters.

Don't worry, you'll get a chance to get behind the guns of your own helicopter.

Yeah, it looks this good on PS3, even at eye-bleeding speeds.

PS3 | R

Burnout Paradise

A thrilling getaway from the racing game norm

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: E10+ PUBLISHER: EA Games DEVELOPER: Criterion Games

The evolutionary path of the *Burnout* franchise is truly amazing. It started on PS2 with a superb yet largely straightforward arcade racer. Its focus shifted in subsequent installments to taking down opponents in the most spectacular crashes this side of *Cops*. For its first spin on PS3, developer Criterion Games has taken *Burnout* a new route. It's a bold move, but it's still *Burnout*, although even seasoned veterans will have to relearn the ropes to some degree. But is it ever worth it.

Paradise City couldn't be a more fitting name for the game's setting. It's a veritable open-ended metropolis with outlying areas built specifically for a fun racing experience. But it doesn't look like an amusement park; it looks like a living, breathing city. A city jam-packed with challenges, ramps, and shortcuts built into the architecture that are rewarding, yet not always easy to find

while tearing around at breakneck speeds. When you smash a barricade, jump a river, or sail across clip gaps, you can't help but feel like a daredevil extraordinaire.

The race setup can be confusing at first. Instead of navigating endless menus and pre-race posturing, you pull up to any intersection and are shown a description of what type of challenge begins where you are and ends at any of eight landmark compass-points on the map. Whether it's down at the Coast Guard marina or up in the hills at the observatory, each direction offers its share of challenging routes. It's

Nudge an opponent's rear panel to deliver a devastating take-down.

The three car classes manage boost differently, so know your ride.

Everyone in Paradise City has a story to tell.

up to you to get there first, aided by a compass, an icon indicating the goal, and flashing intersection signs that tell which way will get you to your goal fastest.

It's not all about being fast, though. There are three car classes: speed, stunt, and aggressive. Depending on which type you select, your boost gauge will fill differently. Stunt cars, for instance, fill up fast, and the boost can be used immediately. Boost on speed cars can't be used until the meter is totally filled, and gets spent in one long burnout. Aggressive rides can take more damage from other racers, but are slowest to build up boost.

Races and their types are revealed on the city map as you "investigate" each intersection, and range from flat-out speed runs to stunt score challenges, and two of our favorites: Road Rage and Marked Man. Road Rage returns from *Burnout Revenge*; in it you take down a specific number of rivals before the timer expires. Marked Man thrills by giving you a destination and daring you to get there without being wrecked (or wrecking yourself) under the clock. You no longer earn new cars by winning races. Rather, you're alerted when a new rival enters Paradise City. Find them, take them down, and their car is shuffled off to the junkyard. Want to drive it? Head there and hop in—just make sure to drive through a repair shop before taking on your next challenge!

Criterion is very keen on not taking you out of the racing for a

moment. To that end, you can drive through gas stations (refills boost), repair shops (repairs damage), or body shops (changes your finish) without leaving the game world. This philosophy extends to our absolute favorite part of this already top-rate racer: online play. Criterion is rightly proud of its Easydrive Friends List system. We've never encountered a more elegant means of going online and having fun with your friends. It's as simple as a d-pad press to the right to see who's playing, another to select a friend, and a tap on X to invite them into your game world. You can do this for multiple friends, then use an equally simple d-pad menu to select group challenges and game modes, such as collaborative objectives and competitive stunt runs. Or, you can opt to just tool around the city together, showing off (or looking silly). The group

co-op challenges alone are some of the most fun we've had playing online in years. Adding to the mix is PlayStation Eye support; hook one up, and every time you're taken down, you'll get the opportunity to send your "friend" a snapshot of yourself. Additionally, the game remembers your friends and keeps track of their best times and other stats, so if you beat one of their high scores offline, you can take a "smugshot" that'll pop up the next time they start the game.

Gloriously fast, a joy to look at, and featuring some of the most spot-on arcade-style handling yet in a console racer, *Burnout Paradise* couldn't have had a better title. Maybe Burnout Heaven or Nirvana is next, but for now we're more than content. **Randy Nelson**
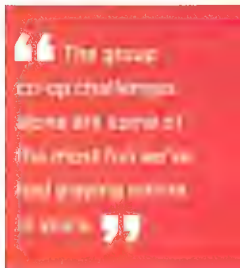
★★★★★

The group co-op challenges alone are some of the most fun we've had playing online in years.

Hidden jumps and shortcuts make it worth exploring the city before taking on the challenges.

If you scrape the paint job, drive through a repair shop to have it fixed.

To pull off 360 degree spins while going off ramps, it's crucial to hit handbrake (square) and hold hard left or right on the steering stick before you go up the ramp. Practice makes perfect, not to mention lots of points

The beauty and grace of PS3 graphics still astound us.

Dunking on Ohio State, at Ohio State? Say it isn't so!

PS3 | R

Karl Malone has something better than a championship ring. he's got a Karl Malone court!

College Hoops 2K8

Hoops still has hops aplenty

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: 2K Sports DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts

Every year, publisher 2K Sports cooks up new gameplay improvements to keep its beloved college baller ahead of the auld enemy, EA's *March Madness* franchise. This year, the main innovation isn't a new set of moves or defensive maneuvers, though some tweaking has been done in those departments; instead, the honor goes to what's called the 6th man Advantage, which is basically a mechanic tied to the home fans that boosts your team's attributes based on how much the crowd is pumping you up. This is a natural extension of last year's efforts to create the atmosphere of a college game both on and off the court. The 6th Man just takes it to another level.

A meter on the bottom of the screen rises and falls as the home team drains 3-pointers and forces turn-overs, eventually turning red, giving you a tide-turning boost. To counter the momentum, the opposing team simply needs to shut down the drive. This will return the momentum to their favor, but it can be a tall order if the opponent is poppin' and the crowd is roaring. The system as a whole works fairly well, though we saw some weird crowd responses (what University of Arizona fans would continue to go nuts when Arizona State steals the ball for a game winning fast break? University of Arizona fans caught in a 6th Man Advantage animation, that's who).

Other notable changes include the Lock-On D that we took issue with in *NBA 2K8*, which is supposed to help defenders get a step up on their man, but is too easy to shake, and Maximum passing, which allows you to sling one of four different types of pass variants to the player of your designation. The Legacy mode is for all intents and purposes the same as last year, save for a nice new recruiting feature that corrals over 1500 high school hopefuls into 120-some teams during the off-season for exhibition games that you'll want to play if you want to crib the best players and get bonus recruiting points.

Graphically, the game looks great and features a ton of nuanced animations that bring the moment-to-moment gameplay to life. Online leagues and 64-team tournaments give the game way more depth then even the robust Legacy provides. Though *College Hoops 2K8* isn't the best college baller to ever suit up and hit the court, it's definitely our pick this year for all you college basketball nuts. **Casey Lynch**

★★★★

The school fight songs are in full effect—you'll get sick of them in about 10 minutes.

Dude, seriously, move your arm, I can't see the basket.

March Madness 08

It's March Madness...in January

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Canada

Where 2K Sports' *College Hoops 2K8* is all about crowd momentum, EA's *March Madness 08* aims to redefine the way you play low-post with its new Dynamic Post-Control system. On offense, you can pull off moves separately or string together combos—pump fakes, drop steps, and hook spins round out our favorites. On D, you can work your post to shadow your opponent with tight man-to-man coverage and close down his passing lane to make a morale stumping block or steal. While the low-post suite of offensive and defensive moves is cool, it isn't anything we haven't seen before.

Of course, franchise features we enjoyed from last year, including Lockdown defense and Intensity Control, are back (as is Dynamic Composure) and mostly to good effect. The real boon is the new 30-year Dynasty mode that, in addition to offering a staggering amount of basketball to be played, has a really fun feature tied to your school's prestige that rewards you for signing four-star recruits and let's you pimp out your campus. Speaking

of recruiting, if you were one of the gridiron geeks who obsessively traded your way to success with *NCAA Football* this year, you'll recognize some of the mechanics here, although recruiting isn't nearly as involved; you can send a coach to poach at games or assign assistants to gather research data.

You've also got 70 Classic teams to play out some of the greatest college match-ups ever. That sounds great until you load up a game and realize you're playing with the same character models as the Dynasty engine and, other than wearing shorter shorts and a fro here or there, you're not really playing with the

teams as much as with the team's colors. Online gamers will be happy to see the advent of online leagues and 32-player bouts, which is a big deal.

Graphically, *March Madness 08* isn't on par with *College Hoops 2K8*, though it does look good. The gameplay feels a bit looser as well, yet *March Madness* offers a much deeper Dynasty mode. For our money, though, we'd go with playability and looks and sacrifice a bit of the depth; hence *March Madness 08* comes a close second to *College Hoops 2K8*. That said, EA has still put together a good basketball game with *March Madness 08*.   Casey Lynch

★★★✓
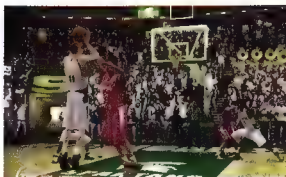
Number 3 looks good now, but how will he feel after we work him through a 30-year dynasty mode?

Guys. GUYS! They're over there, on the left!

PS3 | R

Green smoke means a safer landing.

Medal of Honor:

Airborne

Don't give up on WWII shooters just yet

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER EA

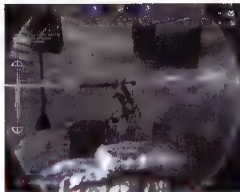Upgrade that sniper rifle and it'll almost shoot itself.

We must have fired off a million rounds in the *Medal of Honor* series since taking Jimmy Paterson through World War II in the 1999 original on the PS1. *MOH: Airborne*'s big "twist" is parachuting—instead of spawning into a set point on a map, you'll banzai out of a DC-3, and use the sixaxis controller to guide yourself to either the "safe zones" (marked with green smoke) or the "die instantly" zones, which are crawling with Nazis. After some play, this seems less like a twist and more like a novelty to us because you can't actually just land anywhere you like. There are "non-landing" zones that you're diverted from by invisible map geom-

etry. And while a couple of the trips down are cinematically awesome, you have only a handful of missions (six in total, spanning operations in France, Italy, Holland, and Germany), so you're on foot with M1 Garand or Thompson in hand far more than you're in the air. Landing objectives and weapon bonuses tied to locating and landing on harder-to-reach points add gameplay value to the gimmick, but whether you achieve them or not doesn't radically change the gameplay.

The game is laid out with vaguely non-linear objectives you can complete in any order. We say vaguely because it's not like the whole world is open and you can do any of 20

things at any time, *GTA* style. It's more like the few levels in *Call of Duty 2* where you have five relatively similar objectives (destroy the anti-aircraft battery, take back this territory sort of stuff) and you decide the order in which you want to do them; but you do so within the parameters of the specific mission.

Another nice touch is upgradeable weapons—the guns become more accurate and deadlier, and consequently more fun, the more you use them. You'll also get "better" with each upgrade, making aiming easier, recoil lower, and reload times faster. This definitely comes in handy

When in doubt, follow the parachute in front of you.

against the enemy AI, especially as you ramp up the difficulty. Playing through twice, once on default and almost all the way through on the expert settings, we could see the AI really reacting differently. On expert, enemies are tough and will flank, use cover, go for high ground, and stay out of your reticule as much as they can, all the while chipping away at you and your comrades. You'll still encounter the occasional idiot AI that just ups and runs at you in a death sprint, happy to die on your bayonet, but for the most part you'll have to work to rack up your kills.

Unfortunately, part of that work comes in managing what we feel is an unruly aiming mechanic—sometimes pulling the left trigger locks you into a zoomed-in iron-sight or scoped view, during which you can't move around; you can only lean left or right. Not only was this disorientating, it just didn't work for us—we're used to being able to run around, even at a slowed pace (as in *Call of Duty 4*, for instance) while in a zoomed stance.

Graphically, *MOH: Airborne* is outrageously beautiful and among the best-looking titles on the PS3—although it has a much more stylized, almost retro-cartoony look than the more realistically rendered *Call of Duty* games. Online play feels a bit limited, with only three gameplay

> **Medal of Honor: Airborne** is outrageously beautiful and among the best looking titles on the PS3.
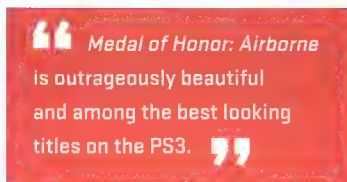
types (deathmatch, team deathmatch, and CTF) and it took awhile to get games going on the PS Network. For us, the downsides weigh more heavily than the ups on this one. We won't be giving *MOH: Airborne* top honors among the greatest WWII games ever, or even the current list of triple-A shooters. Casey Lynch

★★★✦
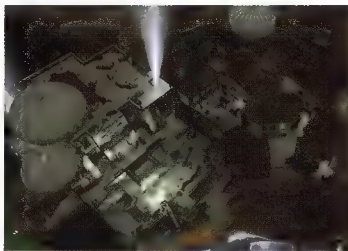
Landing in a skill drop location will yield you the rad weapons.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Editors' Choice
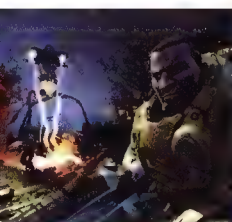
The character models look just as stunning in-game as they do in the cinematics.

With their tripod legs and powerful rays, the Necris Darkwalkers are ominous and deadly.

Tap jump while strafing left or right to quickly hop in that direction. Sometimes little touches like this make a big difference

PS3 | R

Unreal Tournament III

Puts the "killer" in "killer online app"

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Midway DEVELOPER: Epic Games

Just as we were closing out 2007 and reminiscing about some of our favorite experiences on PS3—*Uncharted*, *COD4*, *Ratchet*, and the like—we were already eyeing the big guns on the horizon. *Unreal Tournament III* loomed in the not-so-distant distance as one of the major must-haves for 2008...then Midway and developer Epic Games rallied to get it out before year's end. We're not complaining. In fact, as you read this, you'll find us playing this whopper of a great FPS online.

Disintegrating enemies using the Link Gun is gruesome but extremely satisfying.

You'll feel a rush every time you hop on a vehicle and dash toward your opponent's base.

From glistening tyridium mines to dusty wastelands, the game's combat locales are incredibly varied.
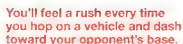
With a couple of exceptions—namely *Unreal Tournament* for Sega Dreamcast and PlayStation 2—the *Unreal* franchise has been a purely PC mainstay. It's made a name for itself on two fronts: a story-driven series and a multiplayer-focused one, hence the "Tournament" in the title. *UT3* is, obviously, the latest—and, we're happy to report, greatest—installment in the latter branch. It delivers a blisteringly paced, downright gorgeous, white-knuckle competitive FPS experience to PS3 that's all about run, gun, and fun. A generous selection of gameplay modes ensures weeks or longer of competitive gaming, and a pop-in-and-play route into online deathmatch arenas for those who may have wondered what all the fuss is about.

UT3 is built on the latest version of the *Unreal* Engine, which was developed by Epic Games and is either powering or soon-to-be-powering many of the biggest PS3 releases. However, since this game is from the engine's originators (who have a tight relationship with Sony's best tech gurus) it's easily one of the most impressive examples you'll see on the system. *UT* has always been about fast-paced action—on PS3 it's not only fast, it's amazing to behold. It's one thing to shoot at virtual enemies; it's another to witness them recoil from every hit, explode into chunks, and mess up a picturesque level that looks like a set from a big-budget sci-fi film.

One glance at the screen shots and you only need to know one more thing: it looks even better in motion. In so many games, though, beauty is only texture-map deep. Not so with *UT3*—it's every bit the stunner under the surface.

Killer Control

Despite the title, *UT3* is technically the fourth game in the series, and the iterative gameplay development pays off for PS3 owners coming fresh to the party. Epic has worked tirelessly over its three predecessors to balance gameplay—from weapon damage to power-ups to rate of movement—to the point that it's simply nailed, spot-on. Each weap-on is unique, and has a purpose and associated tactics. Mastering them, along with the maps themselves, is key to becoming a competitive player—and this is a very competitive game. One aspect of playing *UT3* on PS3 (after having played it and previous titles in the series an... ahem...healthy amount on PC) that we're really impressed by is the control. Thanks to the Sixaxis controller's analog stick, which is more accurate than those of other consoles or past Sony controllers, you truly feel like you can be as good a shot as your skills

> **UT3 looks great, but it's every bit the stunner under the surface.**

Malcolm, a returning character from previous *UT* installments, plays a key role in the campaign story.
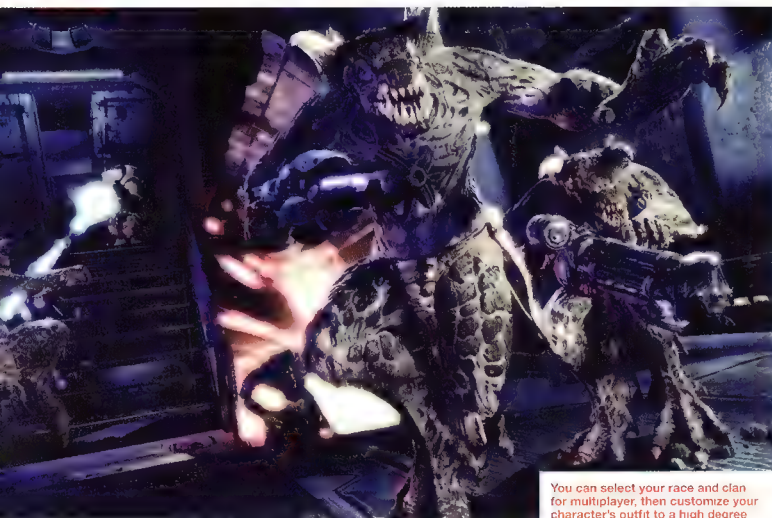
You can select your race and clan for multiplayer, then customize your character's outfit to a high degree

> " Create your own personal match type. Low gravity insta-kill pulse rifle death-match is always a blast. "

PS3 | R

will allow you to be. It's precise and snappy, which is vital to a gameplay dynamic where sluggish response times would kill the experience. It should also be noted that the game ships with support for the forthcoming DualShock 3 controller, so you'll feel every shot, hit, and item pickup when playing with Sony's latest controller tech. We reviewed the game using both controllers and found it equally fun with either, and even though we were a little leery about how the "recoil" of the DS3 would affect our game, it actually didn't hurt anything. Instead, it did as intended, adding to the experience.

It will take dedication and well-honed teamwork to establish your clan as one of the best in the world.

That experience begins however you want it to. Itching to hop online via PlayStation Network and frag a few old friends or new enemies? Done. The game can be installed entirely to the PS3 hard disk, lessening load times, although you'll still need the game disc in the drive to start up. All of the 14 basic multiplayer maps (there are 38 in total across all game modes) are great, offering plenty of potential to learn their ins and outs and develop strategies accordingly. They range from very comfy affairs to sprawling layouts with portals leading to vastly different environs, providing a good selection for varying player counts, from 2 to 16. Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag play out in these locales, and there are plenty of modifiers to adjust for creating your own personalized match type. (Low gravity insta-kill pulse rifle is always a blast.)

Beyond the more standard fare lies Vehicle Deathmatch, Vehicle Capture the Flag, and the big daddy: Warfare. The first two modes are variants of standard modes with vehicles added to the mix. These range from small scout buggies with boosters and an ejector seat (can you say "improvised guided missile?") to *War of the Worlds*–like Necris walkers to massive multi-character behemoths with devastat-

ing alternate firing modes. Part of what makes the game great is that, like the handheld weapons, all of the vehicles are unique, and will have you developing new skills and strategies for months to come.

Warfare mode blends on-foot and vehicle action with elements of real-time strategy. Teams fight to build and protect power nodes. To win in Warfare requires excellent teamwork, with parts of a team split between nodes and defending drones that mine resources that can speed up vehicle regeneration and more. This mode sounds epic, and it is. It's not for the beginning player, but it's rewarding to work toward. Seasoned FPS vets will love it right out of the gate, while still feeling the challenge of learning fresh tactics.

Of course, not everyone is going to want to play online all the time, especially if they want to practice without affecting their ranked score. Thankfully, the game's A.I. opponents, with their various skill levels, are about as close to real humans as you're going to get. They also factor heavily into the single-player campaign mode.

Campaign is the one area of *UT3* where you'll encounter some uneven quality. Basically, the various match types are loosely tied together with some fairly weak story (but amazing real-time cinemas). It's not bad, it's just not as fully realized as the rest of the game.

Finally, speaking of fully realizing the game, we can't get over how cool and promising it is for anyone with a PC to make their own mods for *UT3*. Mods can be anything from new maps to character models to total conversions of the game. All that's needed is free software (from www.unrealtournament3.com) and you can start tinkering. Good modding isn't easy, but it can be extremely rewarding. Plus, your own and others' creations can be posted online for download by both PS3 and PC players (sadly, the PS3 and PC versions of *UT3* can't be played with each other). We'll be back with a more in-depth look at *UT3* modding for PS3, along with a beginner's guide, in a future issue. For now, all you need to know is this: *UT3* is the killer, exclusive PS3 app we hoped it'd be, and if you're not playing it, you're missing out on some damned good times. Randy Nelson

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

You can build different ships, from fast scouts to huge humdingers. Guess which these are?

Even though Bethesda Studios proper didn't develop *Conquest*, the production quality is top notch, especially considering the $14.99 price tag.

Star Trek: Conquest

An ambitious endeavor well worth conquering

PS2 PRICE: $14.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks DEVELOPER: 4JStudios

If you can imagine a *Star Trek*–themed game of Diplomacy that's warped onto the PlayStation 2—one in which you expand your empire from planet to planet in hopes of eventually ruling the known universe—you'll have the gist of what to expect from *Star Trek: Conquest*. But what you need to know first is that the *Star Trek* theme in *Conquest* really amounts to *Star Trek*–lite, as there are no prominent characters from any of the series (similar to *Tactical Assault* on the PSP). Instead, you'll employ one of six *ST* races (Breen, Cardassian, Dominion, Federation, Klingon, or Romulan), who each have unique weapon upgrades and race-specific interfaces, and use them to conquer the different systems in your bid to dominate the universe.

As you go Genghis Khan on each system, you'll set up mining colonies that will supply the cash you'll need to line your ever-deepening space pockets, research facilities to help you strengthen your defenses and outfit your set of three fleets, and starbases to protect your race's booty.

With three main styles of play when fighting, which range from almost entirely hands-off to totally hands-on, we preferred jumping from ship to ship (which you do with a quick d-pad tap), and sharing the business end of our phasers with our enemies like any good intergalactic tyrant should. In addition to the conquest mode, you can pit your ship against enemy vessels in a space battle mode, which is fun but shallow compared to the more robust idea of becoming the big cheese of the universe. Though this wasn't developed in-house by Bethesda (4J Studios was tasked with that duty), *Conquest* still has that Bethesda shine in both the graphics and interface departments. And considering that the game is $14.99, it would be illogical for fans of both strategic games and the *Star Trek* universe not to give *Conquest* a spin. — Casey Lynch
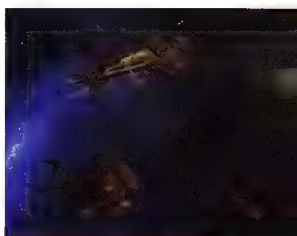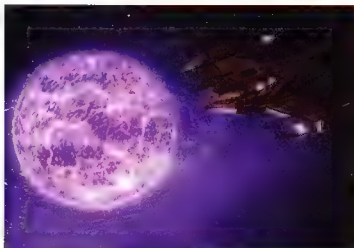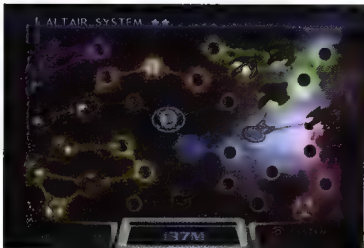
★★★★

All galactic conquerors use space frisbees to dominate the universe.
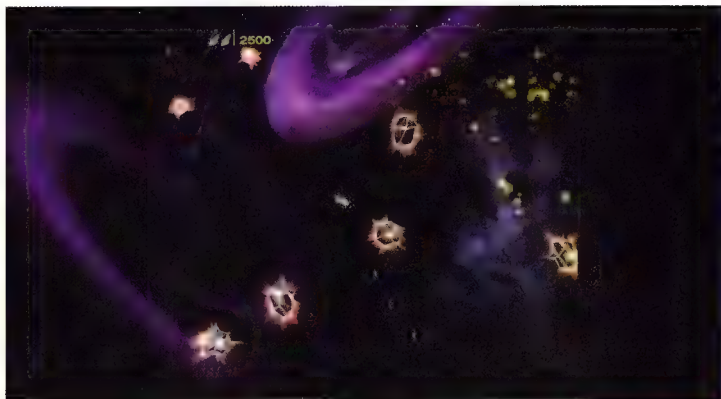

Play through the campaign and link your way to victory (left) or sit and take in some pretty sights (right).

Apparently asteroids are now coated with some radioactive isotope or other, because the all inexplicably glow like Chernobyl.

Pong, anyone?

Say You Want an Evolution...

Atari Classics Evolved includes the following "evolved" 11 games and almost 60 Atari 2600 originals:

Centipede
Millipede
Asteroids
Asteroids Deluxe
Pong
Tempest
Battlezone
Warlords
Super Breakout
Missile Command
Lunar Lander

Atari Classics Evolved

Not every mutation is preferable to the original

PSP PRICE: $19.99 GENRE: Everyone ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: Atari

Each of the eleven marquee classics packed into this flawed retread tour of gaming's past was designed in the heyday of the coin-operated arcade, when sucking down a meal of quarters was the driving force behind design. That original intent—to deliver intense and addictive but brutally short gameplay experiences—translates remarkably well to the handheld format; or rather, it would have if the genuine classics contained within were handled with a bit more care.

Trackballs and knobs were uniquely suited to *Millipede* and *Tempest* in all the ways that a directional pad and twitchy analog nub aren't. The graphics "upgrades" for many of these milestones are slap-dash, and careless at best. *Missile Command's* updated cities are intriguing abstractions—explosion radii are now practically invisible—reducing targeting to glorified guesswork. Meanwhile, *Centipede's* descending arthropod segments suddenly

sport inexplicable vapor trails and leave temporary splotches that serve only to obscure the view of the field. Even simple gems like *Asteroids* and its sequel aren't immune from garish mutations, with all debris suddenly sporting a pointless *TRON* glow.

Thankfully, the same scattershot approach that emphasizes quantity over quality allows some unexpected gems to emerge—a few extra human participants transforms *Warlords* into a revelation of frantic satisfaction, and completing four challenges per game exposes a virtual Atari 2600 and almost 60 of its classic games.

Atari Classics Evolved might be more cynical cash grab than fan service, but its sheer game count and variety could make up for a lot if you find yourself with a nostalgic twitch. Cameron Lewis

★ ★ ½

Missile Command's evolved version is prettier, but vital visuals can get lost in the pyrotechnics.

The obvious dieting has clearly made the Aliens hungry.

Alien vs Predator: Requiem

A fun but mindless alien killin' romp

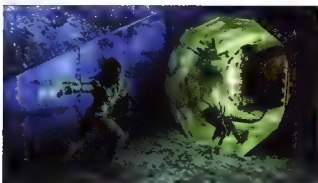**PSP** PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Sierra DEVELOPER: Rebellion

We'll admit we're big *AVP* fans and were pretty excited about getting our hands on *Requiem*. Having done so, we're happy to say that while it certainly is not a great (or even particularly memorable) game, long-time fans of the series will really enjoy this as a nice supplement to its blood- and expletive-bathed movie tie-in.

Playing as a well-equipped Predator, you'll be offing a horde of Aliens that have spawned from a crash-landed Predator cargo ship on Earth (does the plot sound familiar?).

With the Predator's radsauce shoulder cannons, you can triangulate an aiming reticule that rarely misses. There are also wrist blades, but you take more damage when you use these, so we recommend sticking with the shoulder cannons. You control your Preda-powers with the Predator's recognizable wrist contraption, which lets you toggle between Predator skills and abilities, like its patented thermal vision or glassy, see-through cloaking device. The downside of *AVP: Requiem* is the game isn't particularly hard, and though it's always fun to slice, dice, and flambé Alien jerks, the levels (three paths trek through different territory types) all lead up to the same type of huge standoff: the game turns the Alien faucet on, at which point more Aliens than we imagined could fit in a PSP gush out at you. Again, it's not revolutionary but it's damned fun.

Casey Lynch

★★★

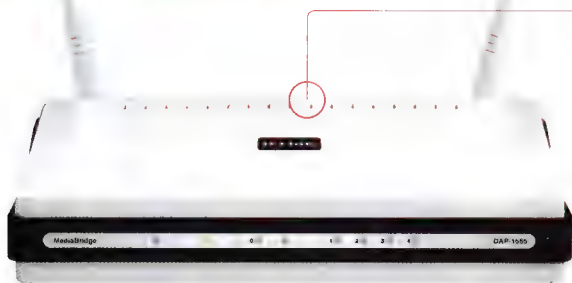No special vision needed here to see that a fight is about to break out.

Hardware
Peripherals, gadgets, gizmos

GamerLounge Xtreme N Gaming Router DGL-4500
$239.99 | D-Link

With the built-in Wi-Fi support offered by PS3 and PSP, combined with the hassle or sheer unattractiveness of running network cables around your house, the case is strong for taking your home network wireless. D-Link's offering for gamers, the DGL-4500, is definitely a tempting package, considering the technology and convenience it packs. On the tech front, it can be configured to prioritize game data on the network over other information (such as streaming media) in order to minimize lag. It also supports draft N wireless, which isn't important when connecting a PS3 or PSP, but is when combined with the D-Link media bridge we're also reviewing this issue. The DGL-4500 also sports a handy top display, which provides network status without the need to fire up a PC and log on to it. It's pricey, but it's worth it given what's under the hood. RN

★★★★

Charge Base 2 DAP-1555
$29.99 | Nyko

This is one accessory every PS3 owner should have. Rather than leaving your system on with controllers connected via USB to charge them, the Charge Base 2 plugs into your wall power and provides a 24/7 charging base for two controllers, no cables necessary. A step up from its previous Sixaxis charger (it also works with the DualShock 3—we've tested it) the Charge Base 2 won't have you accidentally marring your controllers by trying to push them onto mini-USB plugs. Instead, it comes with two plastic charging "plates" that stay plugged into your pads (they actually don't look bad) and make docking them into the charger a set-it-down-and-forget-it process. It's a well-made, attractive piece of gear, to boot. A definite *P:TOM* fave! RN

★★★★★
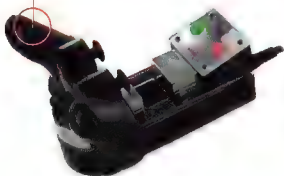
Xtreme N Duo High-Definition MediaBridge DAP-1555
$219.99 | D-Link

Last issue, we talked about streaming virtually any type of video at high resolution from your PC to your PS3. Problem is, unless you have your PS3 connected via a wired network that your PC is on, it can be a slow-and-go affair. When paired with D-Link's own DGL-4500, the DAP-1555 literally bridges the gap between your PS3 and your PC (and other devices with Ethernet ports) wirelessly, with blazing fast draft N speed. Draft N technology isn't just faster, it has a longer range than 802.11a/b/g and makes transmitting multiple HD streams from devices on one end of your home (your PC and an HD TiVo, for instance) to others (a PS3 and your second HD TiVo, let's say) a reality. Pricey? Yes. Worth it? Yes. Part of a great network setup? Definitely. RN

★★★★

PS3 | R
PSP | R
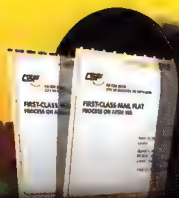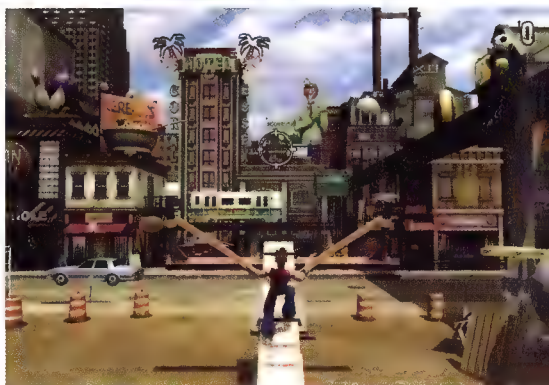
These screens prove that *PAIN* comes in multiple forms.

>> DEVELOPER STRATEGY

PAIN MANAGEMENT

When it comes to multiplayer, *PAIN* can be, well, painful. Associate Producer Jason Coker shares his favorite strategies.

Options for the lone wolves

● For a bowling experience that's less *PAIN*ful (actually this is just for those who can't play online, we just wanted to throw in a pun), use your Sixaxis to land a strike in *High Velocity Bowling*.

● Okay, this has nothing to do with *PAIN*, but this off-the-wall ex-pac adds a lot of content to an already fantastic game. If you can't get online, *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – Shivering Isles* will deliver loads of fun.

PAIN Bowling

Unlike "real" bowling, *PAIN* Bowling involves all players at the same time. Probably the WORST thing you can do is let the person in the launcher do their thing without screwing with them.

Imagine this: It's not your turn. You're not in the launcher. Don't just sit there, dummy. It's all about distractions.

Timing is key. Learn which distractions are where. Some are better to use early, and some are better used at the last minute.

Down but not out. Keep in mind that you can still Ooch your distractions one more time after you've fired them off. This can come in handy against a low-flying or Ooching target.

Panic kills. Using your distractions early and utilizing that Ooch during your opponent's second launch can be very effective. Make 'em nervous on the first launch, smack 'em around on the second.

Remember these tips when it's your turn to be in the launcher:

Your opponents can see where you're aiming, but they can't tell where you're going to drift.

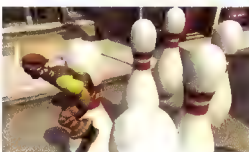It's harder to hit a small target. Poses can help with this.

Save the Super! Unless you absolutely have to, keep your Super Ooch until you're past the pins in case you need to get back to them and clean up. It also comes in handy when you're in

Yum! This cow is heading for a tasty snack

And you thought getting a strike with a real bowling ball was tough.

the middle of a pile of pins and need to take out a couple more.

When you get good, you can use the occasional throw-crate to your advantage. You can chuck those crates at the pins for an extra dose of damage, and remember that your opponents' distractions are a lot less effective when you can blast your way past or through them. It's not easy at first, but it's well worth it once you've mastered the technique.

This one's less of a tip, and more of a strong suggestion: If you're going for a spare on your second launch, and you make it through the distractions without getting hit on the way to the last

standing pins, please, PLEASE insult your opponents by posing. Very few things in life are as satisfying as pulling an L2+X with Jarvis before capping off a spare (except a Strike if you can swing it).

H-O-R-S-E

We all know the basketball game, but HORSE in *PAIN* is a little different. Hitting the same first object as your opponent is the easy part. You still have to rack up an impressive score to win anything. Here are some tips that'll help you spank the competition:

Don't forget the obvious! When your opponent launches first, pay

close attention to what she does right or wrong and use the good stuff to your advantage while avoiding the same mistakes when it's your turn.

Just like in PAINdemonium and Aftermath, it's all about the multiplier. After hitting whatever first object, focus on hitting as many other individual objects as possible to keep that multiplier—and therefore your score—high.

Traffic is a great way to keep that Ooch momentum going.

Don't forget all the goodies along the sides of the street. There are plenty of objects you can Ooch into and still get back into the street for more madness.

Fun With Explosives

There's much more to this than just watching your character bounce around from crate to crate. Without some technique, you're not gonna do well here. Luckily, there are quite a few things you can do to make things easier on yourself and harder on your opponent.

Plan ahead. You have more than one launch to do your thing, so on your first launch, concentrate on an area that has lots of crates to take out. You can clean up the others on a later launch.

Just like in HORSE, it's important to watch your opponent. They might teach you a little something—like what NOT to do.

This is a game of angles. Keep in mind that the angle at which you hit a crate determines the angle at which you will blast off it.

Blasting off a crate can be made even more powerful when you Ooch in the same direction as the blast. Use this to your advantage when you need to travel long distances from crate to crate.

Each of the main street areas is loaded with tons of crates. Starting up high and then working your way from street to street is a great way to bang out a bunch of crates.

Is the street empty? If you've got the Ooch to get there, the subway is a decent place to add a few late-run crates.

Your character isn't the only thing that sets off crates. Debris can work to your advantage, too.

Monkey + football =
a match made
in heaven?

Letters Feedback, Insight, Critical Judgment, and some crazy #%@*!

Siegfried-Raphael is our new favorite character.

NEW DESIGN

Great feedback We've gotten tons of great feedback and it really makes me happy that so many of you are on board with the new look and feel. With *next gen* games able to deliver so much detail and high definition, it seemed to me the best approach was to just get out of the way a little bit. I've seen so many game magazines try too hard. For me, its like standing in front of a painting or photograph in a museum, and this huge, elaborate frame is jumping around in your peripheral vision saying "look at me!" We are also aware that games and gamers are growing up and we wanted something that we could all be seen reading in public. *-Ken*

WHOOPS!

I don't mean to be nit-picky, but I noticed on page 20 for the caption under the upper-right-hand picture there was a slight mistake. You have written: "Siegfried's new duds make him look like he'd be right at home in a *Castlevania* game." Sorry, guys, but that guy is definitely Raphael fighting Tira.

Just to let you know, Siegfried uses a broad sword while Raphael uses a thin rapier. Not a big mistake, but hey, *Soul Calibur II*

LETTER OF THE MONTH

GIVING IT TO THE MAN

It's scandalous that as a "free society" of grown adults, we can't purchase an AO game. I find it even more scandalous that gaming journalists aren't doing more to inform the gamers of what we can do to affect change. And I find it even more scandalous that big box stores think they have the right to ban games for adults, because games are "just kids' toys." I have read several articles and seen many letters over the last few months on the subject. What I haven't seen is any information on who we can write to complain about it. Whose office do we picket? Which retailers do we boycott? Help us help ourselves.
Anonymous, The Internet

Rob: Tough subject, but you can purchase AO (Adults Only) games, though they're usually only available in "adult" stores (or online for download,

was my first fighter game for the PS2 and I can't wait for *SCIV* to hit the shelves.
Cy Hill, The Internet

Randy: Siegfried is actually my character of choice in the *SC* series, so this case of mistaken identity has hit me especially hard. To console myself—and any others who may have been hurt by my gaff—I've come up with a little story.

You see, that was actually Siegfried... disguised as Raphael! He knew that Raphael and Tira had been going through a rough patch in their relationship (heck, they're fighting—with swords!— for goodness sake) and cooked up a plot to finally push her over the edge and send her running into his treacherous arms. Wow, I really have to stop watching so much daytime TV at my desk...

HI-DEF WOES

I just got a new LCD computer monitor, and I want to hook up my PS3 to it so I can play in

> ### "Sorry, guys, but that guy is definitely Raphael fighting Tira." *–Cy Hill*

and mainly available on the PC). Mainstream stores like GameStop, along with big box stores like Best Buy (and, of course, Wal-Mart), won't carry games with that rating. As a result, publishers won't release a game with an AO rating since that will limit where it can be sold and make the release economically unfeasible. Don't expect to see any AO-rated games on PlayStation platforms; that's the nature of the industry and picketing and boycotting won't change it.

hi-res without coughing up the big bucks for an HDTV. Most blogs say VGA is not supported, unless you want to pay over $200 for cables, and then you need to use a few different cables, losing your audio in the process. But some people say that there are a few VGA transcoders on the market that work. What's the verdict on the X2VGA2 2.0? Good? Bad? Or am I doomed to buying an HDTV?
Hugh Stuart, Potsdam, NY
Randy: The verdict on the X2VGA 2 transcoder ($59.95, www.x2vga.com) is overwhelmingly positive. Used with a typical 19", 1280x1024 native resolution LCD monitor, you'll be able to

play PS3 at 720p resolution with no picture quality degradation. If you have a larger LCD display with a higher native resolution, you can achieve 1080p. This is proving to be a great stepping stone to HD for those who can't quite shell out the dough for an HDMI-compatible TV just yet.

GIRL MAGNET

I was one of the few who bought UMD movies. I loved them on my PSP. They looked great, sounded good, and having girls sit right next to me so that they could watch wasn't bad either. I think if we were also able to view them on TV, they would've sold more. That's where the PSP Slim comes in. With the added feature of AV output for video and game playback on TV, I was wondering

whether Sony and other movie studios would be willing to give UMDs another go.
George Harrison, Downey, CA
Teresa: As much as I'm sure Sony and others would love to help you snuggle up with more chicks, it's unlikely that we'll see a resurgence of UMD films. The silver lining is that since UMDs are no longer popular, stores are eager to get rid of them. As of press time, GameStop was selling UMD films like *Advent Children* and *Underworld* for $4.99 a pop! While that deal has probably expired, if you keep your eyes peeled, you just might find yourself getting "lucky."

RETRO SHOPPING

I've been a fan of the *Metal Gear* series since it came out on the original PlayStation. I was surfing the PlayStation Store when it occurred to me that maybe they could put the original game on there. Is there any possibility that this could happen because I can't seem to find the original anywhere.
Corey Landis, Elizabethtown, PA
Teresa: We want to replay the original *Metal Gear*, too! Unfortunately, when we asked Sony, they said that they don't have any official news about this title for the PS Store at this time. However, if you pick up a copy of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* (for PS2), it comes with the original Metal Gear games.

HOME SWEET HOME

I can see from this premiere issue of PTOM that you've got

previews, reviews, news, and updates galore. That's all well and good, but what really excited me about some of the later issues of PSM were those small sections devoted to subsections of the gaming world. The Square Enix Corner was my favorite. Also, I do hope you implement a section devoted to Home once that gets off the ground. A section in which readers could expect to see content concerning such topics as the various trophies one can acquire and what furniture one can purchase for your "home" would be useful and interesting. At the very least, you should write a feature on it in a future issue.
Kathy Gallagher, The Internet
Rob: Home is definitely a big blip on our radar, and I hope to have some exciting news about it very, very soon. We'll devote space in the Network section to Home, and in Update to the other big PlayStation franchises when we have significant news to report.

WE HAVE PLANS...

Now that you are *PlayStation: The Official Magazine*, are there any plans to increase/improve your online presence? For example, I (and this might be only me) don't go out and buy games the moment they appear in stores, but when I do decide that I maybe want to try a game and want to see what you guys have to say about it, I have to go through my magazines to find your review. Most of the time, I don't find that issue. Isn't there a way you can put your reviews, even if it is a summarized version, on your webpage?
Nixon Khoo, The Internet
Rob: We have plans... Too early to reveal right now, but 2008 will be a big year for our readers in print and online. For the time being, we're keeping the old psmonline.com site alive (barely) with updates where we can. For what it's worth, a review database will absolutely be a part of our future online presence.

"Since UMDs are no longer popular, stores are eager to get rid of them." *–Teresa*

The Best
New Web
Videos

Every
Day

Garbage
Free

Find
Something
Good

gloob.tv
fresh hand-picked web videos

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for the price of a good toothbrush. We say Yea or Nay.

+ YEA You'll get full value for your money.

– NAY No legs, no fun, no value.

Tutorial
Learn how to play.

Move   Cancel ✕

Pixel Junk Monsters

PRICE: $7.99 DEVELOPER: Q-Games

+ The object of *Pixel Junk Monsters* is to protect your family of helpless natives by destroying monsters before they reach your abode. But when malicious pandas or bats approach, instead of hacking and slashing, you'll defend your home by building offensive towers out of nearby trees. In the process you'll also be managing money and tower variety (towers vary in speed, range, and power). Though the concept is simple, winning some of the levels is surprisingly tough—enough to compel us to keep turning the game back on. TD

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite downloads from the PlayStation Store this month.

◄ AQUATOPIA WALLPAPER
Turn your PS3 into an aquarium without voiding your warranty with this piece of "interactive art." Aquatopia displays a serene, vivid virtual fish tank onscreen in 720p resolution, and uses the (required) PlayStation Eye camera to map a reflection onto it. You can interact with the fish to a limited degree by feeding them, but that's about it. The experience, however limited, is still worth the $1.99 download — and a lot cheaper than the real thing.

◄ UNCHARTED THEME
We love the adventurous aura of this detailed theme. It lets our imaginations soar, as if we're actually about to step into a dense jungle or ancient crypt, instead of just lounging on our couches nursing cold sodas and cramping fingers.

Also Out Now
Add-ons and Expansion Packs

flOw Expansion Pack
PRICE: $2.99
DEVELOPER: SuperVillain Studios

+ If you haven't already downloaded the original *flOw* (required by this expansion), please do so. Using the sixaxis motion-control to traverse the deep, you'll evolve one of five creatures by consuming others. It's elegant, lovely, and relaxing. The expansion pack adds a sixth denizen of the deep, about 20 minutes of additional gameplay, DualShock 3 vibration support, and an expanded multiplayer mode where up to four different creatures can be controlled at once.

Resistance: Fall of Man Map Pack 2
PRICE: $4.99
DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games

+ Insomniac continues to please the ever-expanding fan base of online *Resistance* players with the release of Map Pack 2. It includes two new multiplayer maps—Axebridge and Bracknell—that are great, on par with those included with the game, or released in Map Pack 1. They're definitely worth it ($2.50 each? It's a steal!). Be sure to download the free Patch 6, which includes numerous game balance fixes, along with the ability to take screens in multiplayer and share them (not to mention how cool it is to swap your army issue backpack for Clank!).

Operation Creature Feature
PRICE: $4.99
DEVELOPER: SCE London Studio

– This extremely short game (the five worlds can be completed in around an hour) serves more as a tech demo for the PlayStation Eye (required) than a deep or challenging experience. Still, it's fun at first to help the titular creatures, the Blurbs, avoid pitfalls and reach each level's exit. You do so by moving your hands—they're attracted to the movement. Interesting concept, but it's not a deep enough experience to warrant five bucks.

Rock Band Artist Packs 1-5
PRICE: $5.49/each
DEVELOPER: Harmonix

+ If you've already mastered everything that came on the *Rock Band* disc, our hats are off to you. Thankfully, there are already plenty of additional downloadable tracks to conquer. Releases as of press time are Metallica Pack 1, Queens of the Stone Age Pack 1, The Police Pack 1, David Bowie Pack 1, Black Sabbath Pack 1, and the Punk pack—for a total of 18 new tracks. With the likes of "Little Sister," "Can't Stand Losing You," and "I Fought the Law and the Law Won" as just a handful of highlights, they offer something for every Rock Band completist.

PlayStation POV
The Game Plan

As you can imagine, releasing the first generation of games for a new platform is a big challenge for every developer in the industry. Looking back on the first year of developing games for PlayStation 3, there were two major challenges for developers. One was that there was a huge increase in the amount of game assets that teams had to produce for a game, allowed by the major reap of the hardware capabilities. The gradual increase of performance of the development tools was not in proportion to the sudden, disruptive jump of console performance, so teams had to come up with new ways to handle assets in the most efficient way possible. The other challenge, unique to third party publishers, was that many of them began development of games on other consoles which were released in the market prior to PS3, and often tried to port the code to PS3 without giving enough thought to the differences of hardware architecture. PS3, especially the Cell processor, is an enormously powerful machine, but you need to carefully prepare your code and assets to take advantage of the system. Recent third party titles such as *Call of Duty 4* and *Burnout Paradise* show the strides developers are making in creating content for PS3.

With these challenges, came many accomplishments in 2007. From our studios, *Resistance: Fall of Man* debuted with the launch of PS3 in all territories including Japan, U.S., Europe, and Asia, and went on to become the number one selling title on the platform. *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* delivered playing the big budget Hollywood movie experience that the video game industry had talked about for so long. In *Uncharted*, the way characters behave and act feels smooth and natural in whatever situations that the game and the player put them in real time. Naughty Dog solved the development dilemma of showing realistic human motions and giving direct control feel to players. This was realized by numerous iterations of tweaking character animation and game play. I believe *Uncharted* will set a new level of expectation from consumers for games in this genre.

Another exciting, new development opportunity that came with the launch of PS3 was the creation of PlayStation Network. We worked with a variety of small but very talented development teams to release creative and fresh network download titles, including *flOw*, *Everyday Shooter*, and *Pain*. These titles give us a glimpse on how downloadable space can provide a creative and commercial opportunity to developers that were not available previously, given the time and financial requirements usually required for conventional disc-based games. The PlayStation Network allows us to create games that can evolve over time by allowing the user to download new levels, characters, and weapons. The day after *Pain* was released, we made two new characters available from within the game menu. We were amazed that more than 50 percent of consumers who purchased *Pain* also purchased these new characters. We no longer see the release of a game as the end of development, but rather the start of engagement with the player. By getting direct feedback from our players, we will be able to add more value to the titles that we release and create a community where players can interact with each other, as well as with our developers. The future features of *Pain* depend on you, the readers of this magazine, so please give us a shout about what you want to see in the game next!

Looking forward to 2008, PlayStation Network will continue to play a large role, not only from a gaming perspective but also given its entertainment and community possibilities as well. *LittleBigPlanet* comes with integrated content-creation tools which enable each

Shu's Background:

- 14 years in the gaming industry
- Joined Ken Kutaragi's R&D team as the first non-technical staff for PlayStation in 1993, two years before the launch of PlayStation in North America
- Oversees first-party product development in North America
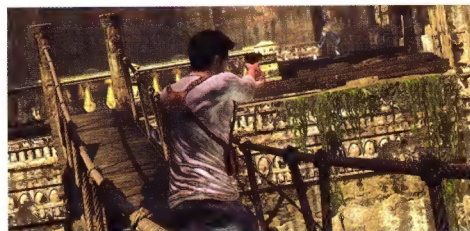
player to dynamically place, edit, morph, rotate and interact with objects within the game world and most importantly, share the results with other players. This game is unlike anything we've seen on any consoles, and will become a start of a big trend in how consumers will enjoy the video game in the future.

Shuhei Yoshida, SVP of Product Development, SCEA

Next month
In PlayStation: The Official Magazine

We've got the inside scoop on the game that will change the industry. Beyond PlayStation 3 you'll see why *LittleBigPlanet* has the style, direction, and pure fun value become the next industry phenomenon.
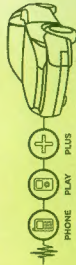
Plus, we've got more insight into what's coming down the road on PlayStation 3 and PSP straight from SCEA insiders. And you don't want to miss the official word on how *Devil May Cry 4* turned out. We'll be reviewing Capcom's much-anticipated release as well as *Turok* and *Lost Planet*. Don't miss it.